



**UNITED  
NATIONS**



**Convention to Combat  
Desertification**

Distr.  
GENERAL

ICCD/COP(7)/7  
3 August 2005

ENGLISH  
Original: FRENCH

CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES  
Seventh session  
Nairobi, 17-28 October 2005  
Item 12 of the provisional agenda

**RATIONALE FOR, MODALITIES FOR, COSTS INVOLVED IN, FEASIBILITY  
OF, POSSIBLE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF, AND INSTITUTIONAL AND  
COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE REGIONAL  
COORDINATION UNITS**

**Note by the secretariat**

**SUMMARY**

1. This study was carried out pursuant to decision 11/COP.6, on regional coordination units (RCUs). It may be recalled that the affected developing country Parties from Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean requested that RCUs be established in order to enable them to effectively meet their obligations under the Convention, particularly as regards their regional action programmes (RAPs) to combat desertification.
2. The study first reviews the rationale for the existing RCUs, their functions and the institutional arrangements that have been put in place.
3. It then takes up the question of regional coordination in the context of the Convention, noting in particular that the lack of any mechanism to coordinate the development of the RAPs may prove a major hindrance to the work of the affected country Parties in the three regions in question.
4. It is likely that strengthening regional coordination, in line with the trend towards decentralization within United Nations agencies, will make it possible to provide more effective support for the affected developing country Parties in respect of their RAPs.

5. The portion of the RCU operating costs it is proposed that the Conference of the Parties (COP) consider for inclusion in the core budget of the Convention is estimated at US\$ 517,900 per year. This figure represents the total annual salary of the three RCU coordinators and their assistants.

6. In order to institutionalize the assistance provided to the affected developing country Parties, the study recommends that the COP, at its seventh session, should take a decision on the role of the existing RCUs and on the corresponding institutional and budgetary arrangements.

## CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
List of acronyms .....		4
I. BACKGROUND .....	1 - 5	5
II. APPROACH .....	6	5
III. RATIONALE FOR REGIONAL COORDINATION UNITS .....	7 - 27	6
A. Requests by the country Parties to the Convention .....	7 - 12	6
B. Decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties .....	13 - 20	7
C. Summary of suggestions from Parties and specialized agencies .....	21 - 22	8
D. Functions of the regional coordination units .....	23 - 27	9
IV. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS .....	28 - 37	12
A. Structure and management of the regional coordination units .....	28 - 34	12
B. Arrangements with the host institutions .....	35 - 37	12
V. REGIONAL COORDINATION .....	38 - 60	13
A. Decentralization of regional activities .....	38 - 43	13
B. Making the best use of the existing regional coordination units .....	44 - 49	15
VI. INDICATIVE OPERATING COSTS OF EXISTING REGIONAL COORDINATION UNITS .....	50 - 60	16
VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	61 - 66	18
References .....		20

### **List of acronyms**

ACSAD	Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands
ADC	Andean Development Corporation
AfDB	African Development Bank
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
AsDB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
CILSS	Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel
CRIC	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
OAS	Organization of American States
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

## I. BACKGROUND

1. Since the entry into force of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), the affected country Parties have taken necessary measures to tackle the root causes of desertification by preparing action programmes at various levels, in accordance with their obligations.
2. At the regional consultations which took place in the late 1990s, the affected country Parties in the regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean found that the Convention guidelines for preparing the regional action programmes (RAPs), as formulated in the annexes on regional implementation of the Convention, did not enable them to fulfil their obligations properly, as there was no regional institutional mechanism capable of agreed joint coordination of their long-term policies on combating desertification and the sustainable management of transboundary national resources.
3. The affected country Parties of the three regions therefore decided to ask the Conference of the Parties (COP) to help them to establish a small coordination unit for each of the affected regions, which could facilitate preparation and implementation of their RAPs within the framework of the overall process of implementation of the Convention. The request submitted by the three regions was confined to coverage of the salaries of a small staff.
4. The Conference of the Parties has considered the question of the functioning of the regional coordination units (RCUs) at its previous sessions. At its sixth session, it decided that, until this agenda item could be considered at its seventh session, the RCU initiative - specifically, essential activities and salaries for the existing posts - would continue to be financed from the Supplementary Fund.
5. The study submitted for consideration by the Parties aims to provide the required information regarding the existing RCUs, their functioning, the institutional arrangements, regional coordination and the financial implications for the Convention should the Parties decide to accede to the request of the affected country Parties of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

## II. APPROACH

6. In preparing this study on the RCUs, the secretariat opted for a phased approach which, in the interests of transparency and objectivity, developed as follows:
  - (a) Pursuant to decision 11/COP.6, an invitation was issued in December 2003 to the Parties, the existing RCUs, the Global Mechanism and any other relevant regional and subregional entities, to submit their views on the RCUs to the secretariat;
  - (b) Two independent consultants were appointed in May and June 2004 - one from the northern hemisphere, one from the southern, in the interests of balance - for a period of two months;

(c) A total of some twenty-nine (29) suggestions concerning the RCUs were received by the secretariat, providing valuable feedback which was analysed and used in the study;

(d) An initial draft of the feasibility study was sent in August 2004 to all the Parties to the Convention for consideration and comment;

(e) The question of the RCUs was also placed on the agenda of the meetings of the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties held in 2004 and 2005; an initial draft of the study was presented and discussed at the Bureau meeting of 2 February 2005;

(f) Various regional groupings took advantage of the informal opportunities provided by the third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) in May 2005 to exchange views on the study;

(g) The present document takes into account all the comments and suggestions which had been submitted in writing to the secretariat by 30 June 2005.

### **III. RATIONALE FOR REGIONAL COORDINATION UNITS**

#### **A. Requests by the country Parties to the Convention**

7. At the first regional implementation meetings, the country Parties of Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean drew attention to the need for small regional units whose terms of reference would be to assist them in fulfilling their obligations in respect of the RAPs, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention and of its regional implementation annexes.

8. In Africa, the principle of an RCU was raised for the first time at the preparatory meeting for the sixth African Ministerial Conference on Environment, which took place in 1995. Subsequently, during preparations for the first session of the Conference of the Parties, participants at the Pan-African conference held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 1997, adopted a resolution on the RAP and the establishment of an RCU. In this resolution, the African country Parties expressed the view that the unit should play a vital role in liaison and coordination between the various thematic programme networks under each RAP to combat desertification.

9. The African countries then asked the secretariat to facilitate preparation of the RAP and recommended that the RCU should address the major issues taken up in the RAP by networking with all the subregional and regional institutions with expertise in areas relevant to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought.

10. In Asia, the need for a regional backup facility to serve as an RCU for the implementation of the Convention in the region was raised in a resolution adopted at the first ministerial conference held in Beijing in May 1997. The affected countries of the region asked the secretariat to assist in establishing an RCU to function as regional backup facility in combating desertification. In the affected Asian countries, the topographical considerations and socio-economic systems mentioned in the Convention's annex on regional implementation are also factors in the need for regional coordination.

11. In the view of these countries, the establishment of an RCU would facilitate the mobilization of international resources to promote coordination, and the cooperation of various United Nations agencies at the regional level, and would promote synergy with other relevant conventions on the environment and coordination with other regional organizations and regional development banks, in support of the subregional and regional action programmes to combat desertification.

12. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean expressed a wish to establish an RCU at their first regional meeting, held in Argentina in 1996. At the ministerial meeting held in Lima, Peru, in 1998, the countries asked the secretariat to help establish such a unit for the region, to be located in Mexico. They also asked the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other United Nations agencies to support the initiative. In addition, they requested the Conference of the Parties, at its second session, to consider including the post of regional technical secretary for the RCU in the regular budget of the secretariat for the biennium 2000-2001.

### **B. Decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties**

13. The question of RCUs has been on the agenda of the last four sessions of the Conference of the Parties.

14. At its fifth session, held in October 2001, the Conference of the Parties recognized the importance of regional approaches and coordination in the implementation of the Convention, and the value of efforts at the regional level identified as the "regional coordination units" initiative. It decided that, until this item was considered by the Conference of the Parties, funding for the initiative should continue to be drawn from the Supplementary Fund (decision 6/COP.5).

15. At its sixth session, held in August and September 2003, the Conference of the Parties recognized the need of the affected developing country Parties and other country Parties for consistent and cost-effective support in promoting regional approaches and coordination in the implementation of the Convention.

16. The Parties recognized the potential of regional coordination in linking activities under the Convention with those of other regional frameworks relating to sustainable development issues, and the role that could be played by the RCUs in this regard.

17. With regard to the implementation of the RAPs, the Parties noted with appreciation the efforts made by the existing RCUs to assist, inter alia, in elaborating programmes and networks in their respective regions.

18. The Parties also noted the cost-effectiveness and efficiency that could be brought about by the location of the existing RCUs in providing assistance to the affected developing countries.

19. In the light of the foregoing, the Conference of the Parties invited the Parties, the existing RCUs, the Global Mechanism and any other relevant regional and subregional entities to submit their views in writing on the best arrangements for strengthening regional coordination. In

particular, the submissions should include views on the rationale for, modalities for, costs involved in, feasibility of, possible terms of reference of, and institutional and collaborative arrangements for the RCUs.

20. The Conference requested the secretariat to facilitate a costed feasibility study on the possible functions, institutional arrangements, modalities and collaborative arrangements of options for cost-effective and efficient regional coordination, and in particular on how to make the best use of the existing RCUs and other relevant regional and subregional entities (decision 11/COP.6).

### **C. Summary of suggestions from Parties and specialized agencies**

21. It is clear from the written submissions received that, while the Parties are generally agreed on the relevance of regional coordination in the framework of the Convention, they may diverge in their recommendations as to the approach to adopt.

22. In total, twenty-nine submissions were received, six of them from affected country Parties in Africa, five from developed country Parties, five from country Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean, four from Asian country Parties and one from an East European country Party. There were also eight submissions from international or regional organizations and United Nations agencies. The opinions expressed may be summarized as follows:

(a) Recognition of the importance of effective regional cooperation for implementation of the Convention, and particularly insofar as it enables intersectoral issues at the regional and subregional levels to be integrated to advantage;

(b) Recognition of the importance of the role of the RCUs in coordination and facilitation;

(c) Need to decentralize certain of the secretariat's facilitation functions to the regional level in order to improve the response to the needs of the country Parties and other actors;

(d) Account to be taken of cooperation already established at the regional level between the RCUs and the relevant subregional and regional institutions;

(e) Reaffirmation of the importance of cooperation between the RCUs and regional organizations working to combat desertification;

(f) In the view of one Party, the study should consider scenarios for a possible network of existing organizations working at the regional level on issues of common interest, which could increase the synergy between the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in particular through technology transfer and capacity-building;

(g) Another Party suggests that the tasks proposed for the RCUs could be performed by the secretariat in Bonn, and that there is therefore no need for RCUs;

- (h) The same country suggests strengthening the capacity of the existing institutions, including the subregional organizations, to enable them to support the RAPs;
- (i) Two submissions which recognize the importance of regional coordination do not, however, see any benefit in establishing RCUs; indeed, one of them suggests they could lead to the emergence of new bureaucracies;
- (j) One country Party believes that it is important to use available funds in a rational manner and that the current arrangements for the three existing RCUs should therefore be reinforced;
- (k) The same country also believes that the host institutions should continue to bear some of the costs (office space and computer and communications equipment), and that the secretariat should provide the funds to maintain the current staffing level of each RCU (regional coordinator and one assistant);
- (l) The majority of the country Parties consider that the RCUs are a backup facility without which the RAPs cannot be effectively implemented;
- (m) A number of countries express the view that the establishment of RCUs must not lead to duplication of work and that the financial viability of the operation must be guaranteed;
- (n) Many country Parties emphasize that the RCUs are part of the secretariat; they believe the current arrangements allow the similar problems facing the majority of countries to be tackled economically and promptly;
- (o) In one country's view, the RCUs' geographical proximity to the affected country Parties means they have a better understanding of the cultural context and the geographical situation; RCUs can provide effective coordination in the regions with lower expenditure on travel and communications;
- (p) One country Party favours the establishment of an RCU in south-eastern Europe.

#### **D. Functions of the regional coordination units**

23. The purpose of the existing RCUs is to enhance the effectiveness of the services provided to the developing countries concerned, by following certain guiding principles such as the provisions set out in the main text of the Convention and its annexes, as well as the implementation at the regional level of the relevant decisions of the COP and of requests for technical assistance made by the developing country Parties and by the subregional and regional organizations concerned. In this framework, the functions of the RCUs should be viewed as means of promoting the regional activities launched under the Convention and thus complementing the activities of the affected developing countries.

24. In this regard, the existing RCUs perform the following functions:

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

(b) Promotion of capacity-building for activities which are better implemented at the regional level, monitoring and evaluation of capacity-building activities launched at the subregional and regional levels;

(c) Promotion of educational activities which give the public a better appreciation of the Convention and drafting of educational publications addressed to various groups and focusing on efforts to combat desertification and drought;

(d) Promotion of scientific research and technical cooperation through assistance for the development of the key sectors of the thematic programme networks identified by experts in the region;

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

(f) Transformation of the regional information networks into effective tools which contribute to the production, collection and dissemination of appropriate data which can be used by various interested parties in the design and implementation of projects to combat desertification and alleviate the impacts of drought;

(g) Support for the development of the RAP as well as follow-up and evaluation of the implementation of the RAPs in collaboration with existing organizations, while paying due attention to the necessary relationships with the subregional and national levels;

(h) Promotion and strengthening of synergistic activities with other organizations and facilitation of the conclusion of partnership agreements for the implementation of the Convention at the regional level;

(i) Organization of public awareness campaigns and events such as World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought;

(j) Follow-up to the relevant decisions of the COP and its subsidiary bodies as well as the regional meetings on the implementation of the Convention;

(k) Provision of technical support to country Parties on request and the proposing and promotion of programmes of cooperation among countries and relevant regional institutions;

(l) Promotion and dissemination at the subregional and regional levels of information on successful desertification control practices;

(m) Supplementing the activities of country Parties and other interested partners in addressing the needs of the main actors and day-to-day coordination of the implementation of the RAP;

(n) Assistance to countries in developing initiatives that are easier to implement at the regional or subregional level;

- (o) Efforts to ensure that the goals and objectives of the Convention are reflected in the programmes of the principal regional initiatives relating to sustainable development;
- (p) In Africa only, a contribution to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), by facilitating the formulation of desertification control projects under the action plan for the NEPAD environmental initiative;
- (q) In Latin America and the Caribbean only, support for the development of the regional Information Network to Combat Drought and Desertification in Latin America and the Caribbean (DESELAC);
- (r) In Asia, support for the regional aspects stemming from the Abu Dhabi initiative;
- (s) Day-to-day liaison with countries, cooperating institutions and organizations in the region, as well as the Convention secretariat;
- (t) Participation in subregional and regional Convention-related events on behalf of the secretariat and as required;
- (u) Design and implementation of a joint work programme with the host institution;
- (v) Drafting of progress reports on the RAP and submission to the secretariat.

25. Despite very scant resources, the RCUs have succeeded in asserting themselves as central links for facilitating the RAPs in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to perform the very specific functions they have been assigned.

26. According to the written submissions from the countries in these three regions, the RCUs have played a key role in helping to incorporate the regional CCD process into decision makers' priorities, and this has led to effective exchanges of information as well as effective coordination with the various subregional and regional activities. These countries emphasize that such an operation would have been more difficult to imagine if the connection always had to be made directly with the Convention secretariat in Bonn.

27. In this way the African countries indicate that their RCU supports the formulation of the RAP in close cooperation with the relevant subregional and regional institutions. The design and establishment of the six thematic programme networks involved a variety of specialist institutions and organizations. The RCU coordinated and harmonized the policies and rationalized the strategies concerning the priority sectoral areas defined by African experts. It also helped to promote the exchange of information, data, experience and know-how among various specialist African institutions. Thanks to the thematic programme networks, there is now an integrated information system which enables each of the relevant specialist institutions to make a more effective contribution to the process of PAR implementation. The RCU, the main conduit for information at the regional level, is regarded by the decision makers of the region as an essential element which makes it possible to boost coordination among the existing institutions.

## **IV. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**

### **A. Structure and management of the regional coordination units**

28. A little over five years after their creation, the RCUs perform a function in the context of the CCD process which will have enabled the countries of the three regions concerned to prepare their RAPs for desertification control correctly.

29. From the organizational standpoint, the RCUs are regarded as decentralized units which receive their guidelines from the Convention secretariat. In the day-to-day management of their activities, each RCU functions under the direct authority of the facilitation unit of the secretariat responsible for monitoring its region. At the start of the year the secretariat approves the work programmes of the RCUs, which report on their activities in the main progress report by the secretariat submitted to the COP at each regular session.

30. The RCUs also receive support from the secretariat on administrative issues which concern them. In terms of staff, the average per RCU is two, the principal coordinator and his or her assistant.

31. Given the scant staff also available to the secretariat, the country Parties in the three regions concerned would not have succeeded in developing their RAPs to the present level in a few years without technical support from the RCUs.

32. For example, in Africa, a region assigned priority in the CCD process, the secretariat has four (4) Professional staff. These must serve the fifty-three (53) countries in the region as well as the five subregional organizations which are the liaison centres for the subregional action programmes (SRAPs), and they must also respond to the many types of appeal related to the drafting of the RAP for desertification control.

33. In this context, the RCUs have played a prominent role, taking on all the requests linked to the RAP as well as the development of the thematic programme networks. It should be emphasized that there is no institutional machinery in the region handling the strategic role of the RAP in coordinating efforts to combat desertification.

34. The RCUs also assist the Global Mechanism and the secretariat in the implementation of their joint work programme, whenever this involves regional activities, and particularly those of the thematic programme networks. This type of service is outlined in the current work programme, which states that in order to facilitate the implementation of the work programme, the Global Mechanism and the secretariat will call on the services of the RCUs under the Convention, as needed.

### **B. Arrangements with the host institutions**

35. At the request of the countries of the regions concerned, the secretariat facilitated the hosting of three RCUs by negotiating and concluding with the host institutions and, as needed, with the host countries, memorandums of agreement to govern the operation of the units. In this regard, the following institutional arrangements were concluded between the secretariat, the institutions and the host countries:

- Africa - a memorandum of agreement was signed in 1999 between the secretariat and the African Development Bank (AfDB) for the hosting of the RCU in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. A host country agreement was also signed between the secretariat and the Côte d'Ivoire Government.
- Asia - The United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), based in Bangkok, Thailand, hosts the RCU. An agreement on this subject was signed in 2000 between ESCAP and the secretariat.
- Latin America and the Caribbean - an initial memorandum of agreement was concluded in 1998 with the UNEP regional office in Mexico. It was followed by an agreement with the host country signed in 1999. In 2002, the RCU moved to the offices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). A memorandum of agreement was signed the same year between ECLAC and the secretariat.

36. The RCUs passed through a trial period which made it possible to check that their presence in the host institutions strengthens their capacity to respond to the needs of the affected countries in the three regions. The decision to place the RCUs in the three institutions mentioned above offers benefits which go beyond mere physical hosting. In this way, these institutional arrangements evolved over time and were transformed into a platform for cooperation between the RCUs and the departments of these institutions responsible for sustainable development and poverty alleviation issues.

37. Their presence in the regional institutions contributes real added value, by influencing the activities relating to the action programmes launched by these organizations and linking the activities in question to one another. This is the case in Africa, where scope may be found for increasing the support granted to the objectives of the Convention in the AfDB portfolio devoted to rural development, as well as in the activities launched by the World Bank in this sector in cooperation with AfDB. Similarly, in Asia, there is a link with the ESCAP socio-economic policy and activities for the promotion of natural resources management, while in Latin America and the Caribbean there is also a link with ECLAC's activities for the promotion of sustainable development.

## **V. REGIONAL COORDINATION**

### **A. Decentralization of regional activities**

38. From their establishment onwards, all the existing RCUs were encouraged to develop working links with other existing subregional and regional institutions, as well as centres of excellence, in order to maximize benefit from all the expert capacity available for the benefit of the RAPs.

39. In the United Nations system, the trend is towards decentralization of programmes of technical assistance and development assistance, within a framework of regional cooperation based on shared needs and similar cultural and geographical circumstances, which enable the United Nations programmes to be implemented more effectively.

40. In the framework of the functions assigned to them, the RCUs began to develop significant working links with other subregional and regional machinery. The actions targeted currently relate most often to promotion of the Convention using various communication media, organization of coordination meetings on priority action areas of the RAPs, synergy with multilateral agreements on environment and sustainable development, substantial contributions to the major events connected with efforts to combat desertification and the management of shared natural resources which are organized in the region.

41. Analysis of the activities of some organizations working in the field of sustainable development, and in particular the institutions in the United Nations system and international organizations, confirms that the decentralized offices and regional representative offices allow cooperation with the beneficiary countries to be enhanced. As the international community has acknowledged that CCD is an important tool which contributes to efforts to eliminate poverty, the RCUs also have a specific role to play at the regional level to the benefit of the affected developing countries. The aim remains that of instituting the best regional mechanism which can help the countries to move forward thanks to a set of necessary regional measures which have a direct impact on efforts to combat desertification and alleviate the effects of drought.

42. The decision to support the operation of the RCUs set up under the Convention corresponds to the general policy of the United Nations focused on decentralization of some of the activities of its agencies, in order to serve the Member States better. Mention could be made in this regard of some institutions which have amplified this regionalized movement, including for activities relating to land degradation, desertification control and alleviation of the impacts of drought:

(a) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) located its Drylands Development Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. There are representatives of the Centre in East and Southern Africa, in West and Central Africa, in North Africa/Western Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Centre's main functions are to offer services at the national level to support RAP formulation, capacity-building, vocational training, help in developing partnerships among all the parties involved and assistance in mobilizing resources for programme design. The Centre also supports activities linked to the SRAPs. It has long been cooperating with the Convention secretariat thanks to precise provisions adopted by UNDP and the secretariat. Most of these activities are linked to the support offered to the affected countries at the national level and the cooperation for the design of joint initiatives and synergistic programmes concerning desertification and drought. To date, the Centre has not participated in the activities of the RCUs. However, scope for cooperation in the framework of the thematic programme networks would constitute a sound foundation for strengthening cooperation at the regional level.

(b) The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has decentralized most of its basic activities to its regional, subregional and liaison offices, in addition to its national representative offices. Their role is to determine the priority areas of action, give a multidisciplinary orientation to the programmes of the regions, maintain technical dialogue and cooperation among and between the member countries of FAO and ensure

participation by national and international institutions. Regional FAO offices are closely involved in the design and implementation of certain thematic programme networks under the RAP. In this way, the African RCU and the FAO regional office in Accra, Ghana, jointly prepared the launching of the thematic programme network on agroforestry and soil conservation in Africa.

(c) The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has regional offices in Africa, Europe, Asia/Pacific and Latin America/Caribbean in addition to liaison offices, units for special programmes, collaborating centres for joint programmes and secretariats for certain conventions from which joint or cooperative activities with other conventions are carried out. The regional offices of UNEP are already cooperating with the RCUs, notably for the preparation of special reports on land degradation and the design of thematic programme networks under a RAP. Through its regional offices, UNEP has supported the operation of the RCUs for Africa and for Latin America and the Caribbean. Cooperation between UNEP and the RCUs also covers assistance for the design of desertification control projects under NEPAD, as well as the drafting of reports such as the paper on combating dust and sand storms in North-East Asia. It is the RCU for Asia, in cooperation with UNEP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), FAO and the Government of China which prepared this paper, recognized by all experts as one of the best documents concerning the devastating sand storms which occur in the arid zones and affect the ecological and economic underpinnings of many Asian countries.

43. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the decentralized offices of these agencies do not offer comparative advantages as regards absorption of the functions of the RCUs on the basis of their existing resources, since they do not have detailed knowledge of the CCD process.

#### **B. Making the best use of the existing regional coordination units**

44. Although they have very limited staff and facilities, the existing RCUs have demonstrated their ability to respond to the needs of the Parties and to link the activities under the Convention to those of other subregional and regional machinery active on land degradation issues. The RCUs play an essential role in relation to the promotion of the thematic programme networks which are vital for the implementation of the RAPs.

45. According to some countries in the affected regions, the existence of the RCUs is justified for practical reasons. In Africa, for example, the RCU has maintained and extended its cooperation with competent subregional institutions such as the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Arab Maghreb Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and regional institutions such as the African Union and AfDB.

46. In Asia, the RCU maintains close cooperation with institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (AsDB), the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), the Northeast Asian Subregional Programme of

Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC), the Arab Centre for Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD) and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA).

47. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the RCU has enhanced its links with the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Andean Development Corporation, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of American States (OAS).

48. In these three regions, the RCUs offered technical assistance to the countries, cooperating with the regional focal points responsible for coordinating the thematic programme networks and strengthening their cooperation with United Nations specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations, stakeholders in the private sector and university and research establishments.

49. The RCUs can certainly develop or strengthen these cooperative links established with subregional and regional institutions, as well as with the regional offices of the United Nations agencies. In that regard, however, the functions of the RCUs should remain under the supervision of CCD. None of the subregional or regional partner organizations has, by virtue of its terms of reference and its geographical coverage, a coordination mechanism enabling it to provide the technical assistance needed for the smooth running of a programme of regional scope such as the RAP. On the other hand, it has become apparent that since their establishment and despite their small size, the existing RCUs have managed to create their own identity and that they are recognized as genuine partners by the other regional institutions. This identity can be further strengthened as a result of the efforts under way to ensure better coordination of activities between the RCUs and each of the regional institutions mentioned.

## **VI. INDICATIVE OPERATING COSTS OF EXISTING REGIONAL COORDINATION UNITS**

50. Cost-benefit analysis of the existing RCUs should take into account the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the services provided in the regions concerned. Consequently, the analysis relating to a comparison of indirect costs is rather revealing depending on whether certain activities are initiated from the secretariat in Bonn or from one of the RCUs. Experience in recent years shows that the budget for a mission may be double that for another if one takes as a parameter the travel costs for the missions and meetings and communication costs. Travelling from their RCUs in one of the three regions considered leads not only to lower costs but also to a substantial gain in travel time.

51. In addition, it should be remembered that the institutions hosting the RCUs all offer excellent conference facilities, so that technical meetings falling under the CCD work programme can be organized locally. Here too, experience in recent years on the ADB and ESCAP sites has confirmed that the logistical costs of conferences are almost nil and the costs of participation by eligible experts very low, since the latter come essentially from within the region.

52. In the field of assistance provided to the Parties day by day, it is appreciated that certain RCUs - such as the one based in Asia - can follow the same working hours as their counterparts in the region. Before the creation of the RCUs, it was not unusual for Bonn colleagues to go to the office late in the evening to deal with questions requiring urgent action, so as to be able to communicate with the focal points or other decision makers based in Asia. This promptness in solving problems which is made possible by proximity to the persons concerned constitutes a further comparative advantage of the RCUs. What is more, costs for telephone communication are lower in Bonn as a result.

53. The RCUs have a small staff, each of them having a coordinator and his or her assistant. The costs to be met to ensure the proper operation of each regional coordination unit include the following items: office rent, office maintenance, communications, equipment and supplies, current expenses and wages.

54. For all the costs listed above, except for wages, specific arrangements are made in cooperation with the host institutions. In Africa and Asia, the bulk of overhead costs is absorbed by AfDB and ESCAP. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the secretariat pays a share of the operating costs.

55. It follows from the above that only the RCU wages component is put before the Parties for consideration. Up to the present, these wages costs have been financed from contributions to the supplementary fund, pending a decision by the COP to include them in the core budget.

56. Following the earlier decisions by the COP on this topic, the secretariat mobilized the voluntary financial contributions of a few interested partners. Thanks to this temporary provision, the operation of the RCU for Africa was supported by UNEP, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the Government of Italy, while the office space, furniture, equipment (computers and printers) and access to means of communication, except for international telephone calls, are covered by AfDB. As for the RCU in Asia, the Government of China had offered a contribution which ended in 2004, while ESCAP offers office space, furniture, equipment (computers and printers) and access to means of communication, except for international telephone calls. The RCU in Latin America and the Caribbean initially received support from the Governments of Argentina, Chile, Cuba and Mexico. Currently, ECLAC is offering furniture and office equipment, while the secretariat is paying the salary of the coordinator, office rent and communication costs.

57. However, experience has shown that, for initiatives similar to those of the RCUs, a financing plan based entirely on voluntary contributions is not viable. In addition, given the modest level of staff resources in Bonn on a context of budgetary restrictions, it is not realistic at this stage, bearing in mind the indications provided in paragraph 32 above, to fill the RCU posts by transferring posts from Bonn. The possibility of incorporating the wages of RCU staff in the Convention's core budget would ensure the institutional continuity needed for long-term planning of CCD activities.

58. In this context, it is suggested to the Parties that the salaries of the coordinator and one assistant per RCU should be incorporated into the core budget. This proposal is reflected each year in staff costs, for a total of six (6) persons, for which table 1 below supplies estimates.

**Table 1**  
**RCU staff costs per year (United States dollars)**

	Asia	Africa	Latin America/ Caribbean	Total
Salaries of the three coordinators <sup>1</sup>	140 000	175 000	136 900	451 900
Salaries of the three secretaries	19 000	17 000	30 000	66 000
Overall total	159 000	192 000	166 900	517 900

<sup>1</sup> Source: United Nations salary scale in the RCU duty stations.

59. Wage costs for all the RCUs total US\$ 517,900 per year.

60. It is also suggested that the secretariat should maintain the arrangement with the host institutions which have agreed to share in meeting certain RCU operating costs and that the other costs (communications, travel) should continue to be covered from voluntary contributions to the Supplementary Fund.

**Table 2**  
**Indicative RCU operating costs (United States dollars)**

	Asia	Africa	Latin America/ Caribbean	Total
Travel <sup>1</sup>	21 160	29 225	11 055	61 440
Communication costs	2 500	6 000	2 800	11 300
Office rent	FR <sup>(1)</sup>	FR	14 400	14 400
Office maintenance	FR	FR	4 500	4 500
Office supplies and equipment	600	200	600	1 400
Overall total	24 260	35 425	33 355	93 040

Note: FR = For the record.

<sup>1</sup> Basis for calculating air travel provided by the United Nations Travel Office in Bonn.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

61. Since the Convention entered into force, the affected developing countries have demonstrated their resolve to comply with their obligations as to the implementation of the Convention. In that regard, the affected country Parties in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean have expressed a wish to set up regional support machinery which will enable them to devise coordinated activities, in the framework of the regional annexes for the implementation of the Convention, in order to promote their RAPs.

62. Decision 11/COP.6 notes with appreciation the efforts which the existing RCUs are making to assist, inter alia, in elaborating programmes and networks in their respective regions with regard to the implementation of the RAPs. The Parties also note the cost-effectiveness and efficiency that could be brought about by the location of the existing RCUs in the regions in providing assistance to the affected developing countries.

63. It should be recognized that without the work of the RCUs in relation to the different counterpart contributions in their respective regions, the RAPs would not have accomplished the progress recorded to date.

64. The steps taken to date have contributed to the establishment of essential sectoral areas serving as a basis for the RAPs. Despite very small staff numbers, the RCUs have effectively complemented the work of the secretariat and have demonstrated their capacity to meet the assistance needs of the affected developing countries. What is more, they have made a major contribution to linking their desertification control activities to those of other subregional and regional organizations, thus helping to enhance the coherence of sustainable land management policies in the regions mentioned.

65. Many regional and international partners have benefited from the results of the activities of the RCUs. This is true of the action plan for the NEPAD environmental initiative, whose desertification control component draws first and foremost on the action areas of the regional desertification control programme.

66. The study has tried to provide the Parties with a mass of information stemming from the knowledge available on the RCUs. Following these deliberations, at its seventh session, the COP will wish to take a decision on the RCUs taking into account the following recommendations:

- Approve the proposal for the payment of the wage costs mentioned in the study, drawing on the core budget and totalling US\$ 517,900;
- Request the secretariat to maintain the arrangement with the institutions hosting the RCUs as regards their share in funding certain of the units' operating costs;
- Approve the functions of the RCUs as presented, taking into account the institutional link with the secretariat;
- Request the secretariat to prepare and submit to the eighth session of the COP a report on the activities of the RCUs and on progress made in the regional coordination effort to support the thematic networks which are active in the implementation of the RAPs.

## References

### A. Relevant documents of the Conference of the Parties

ICCD/COP(4)/2/Add.1	Programme budget
ICCD/COP(4)/11/Add.1	Decision 4/COP.4
ICCD/COP(5)/2/Add.5	Programme budget
ICCD/COP(5)/11/Add.1	Decision 6/COP.5
ICCD/COP(6)/2/Add.6	Programme budget
ICCD/COP(6)/11/Add.1	Decision 11/COP.6
ICCD/COP(6)/INF.4	Inputs from the regional meetings of affected country Parties
ICCD/CRIC(2)/2	Review of the implementation of the Convention and of its institutional arrangements, pursuant to article 22, paragraph 2 (a) and (b), and article 26 of the Convention
ICCD/CRIC(2)/4	Global Mechanism
ICCD/CRIC(2)/5	Global Mechanism

### B. Written contributions from country Parties and institutions

Argentina

Benin

Barbados

Botswana

Burkina Faso

Canada

China

Colombia

Cuba

Ethiopia

Japan

Jordan

Luxembourg (on behalf of the European Union)

Morocco

Malaysia

Norway (on behalf of JUSSCANNZ)

Peru

Syrian Arab Republic

Republic of Moldova

Swaziland (on behalf of Africa)

United States of America

African Development Bank (AfDB)

International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA)

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)/ Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS)

Arab Maghreb Union

-----