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Final report of the Group of Experts

**Report of the fifth meeting of the Group of Experts
of the Committee on Science and Technology**

Note by the secretariat*

Addendum

Benchmarks and indicators for monitoring and assessment of desertification

Summary

The Group of Experts (GoE) of the Committee on Science and Technology, in responding to a request by the Conference of the Parties, has attempted to show how the important amount of available information on benchmarks and indicators can be better utilized at national, subregional or regional levels for monitoring and assessment in the context of the Convention. In proposing a low-cost strategy for improving the reporting process, and more specifically the country profile, the GoE envisages that once the strategy is adopted, Parties would take full advantage of the country profiles as very useful instruments. This would be a first step toward a more useful framework on benchmarks and indicators in the context of the Convention.

* The submission of this document was delayed due to the short time available between the fifth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties.

This document highlights how an action-oriented analytical approach to understanding the processes of desertification could help in developing an efficient system for monitoring and assessing the implementation of national action programmes (NAPs). It could therefore help in identifying NAP impact indicators linked to indicators of the dynamic state and trends of desertification. In this endeavour the document presents a concept, concrete objectives and a proposal for the development of an improved country profile.

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I. Introduction

1. The Conference of the Parties (COP), by its decision 17/COP.7, noting the work of the Group of Experts (GoE) of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) in providing assistance for the development of appropriate benchmark and indicator systems for monitoring and assessment of desertification, requested the GoE to give high priority to this work taking into consideration all relevant initiatives. The COP further requested the GoE to give special attention to participatory and integrated approaches to benchmark and indicator systems for monitoring and assessment of socio-economic and biophysical aspects of desertification. The report of the GoE is presented in this document.

2. The objective of the report is to show how the important amount of available information on benchmarks and indicators can be better utilized at national, subregional or regional levels for monitoring and assessment within the framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In proposing a low-cost strategy for improving the reporting process, and more specifically the country profile, the GoE envisages that once the strategy is adopted, Parties would take full advantage of the country profiles as very useful instruments. The adoption of the strategy would represent a first step toward a more useful framework on benchmarks and indicators in the context of the UNCCD.

II. Historical perspective

3. The Convention refers to different types of indicators that should be developed: benchmarks and indicators to measure progress in the implementation of the Convention (article 10), and impact indicators of desertification, drought and land degradation (article 16). Article 16 underlines the importance of integrating and coordinating data collection and analysis in order to ensure systematic observation of land degradation in affected areas.

4. During the tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INCD) in 1997, a report (A/AC.241/INF.4) was presented which proposed indicators to monitor UNCCD implementation processes and included a first set of recommendations for the development of impact indicators relating to the reporting process on the implementation of the national action programmes (NAPs). This work was completed by two ad hoc panels, which contributed common elements for a methodology to define (ICCD/COP(1)/CST/3/Add.1) and implement (ICCD/COP(2)/CST/3/Add.1) impact indicators.

5. The table below shows the decisions and documents of the COP that make direct reference to the issue of benchmarks and indicators.

6. It is noteworthy that the analysis by the GoE of the national reports submitted to the third and fifth sessions of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) concluded that there has been poor utilization of the benchmarks and indicators at the national level. This is despite the fact that this issue has been identified as a priority since the first session of the COP, and that the COP has made many requests to country Parties to experiment on benchmarks and indicators and to report back to it on progress. So far all those initiatives seem not to have translated into a consensus among the country Parties, and therefore the issue is still on the agenda of the CST for further consideration.

Table. Decisions and documents of the COP that make direct reference to benchmarks and indicators

	COP 1	COP 2	COP 3	COP 4	COP 5	COP 6	COP 7
Decisions on benchmarks and indicators	22	16	11	11	11	17	17
Decisions referring to benchmarks and indicators				10	3		1, 4, 8, 15, 20
Documents/ reports	ICCD/ COP(1)/ CST/3 ICCD/ COP(1)/ CST/3/ Add.1	ICCD/ COP(2)/ CST/3 ICCD/ COP(2)/ CST/3/ Add.1	ICCD/ COP(3)/5/ Add.2	ICCD/ COP(4)/ CST/5	ICCD/ COP(5)/ CST/7	ICCD/ COP(6)/ CST/5	ICCD/ COP(7)/ CST/6

III. Specificity of benchmarks and indicators in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification approach

7. The NAPs are the overall strategic framework for the implementation of the Convention at the country level. After an assessment of the country Party context, the NAP is elaborated defining a specific set of activities to be undertaken in the endeavour of combating desertification. In considering benchmarks and indicators linked to the processes of desertification, the areas of monitoring, assessment and early warning systems have been identified as the integral components of the holistic approach to understanding the causal factors and spatio-temporal characteristics of drought and desertification processes. It is apparent from the guiding principle of the Convention that an assessment of desertification at periodic intervals should be a pre-requisite for the implementation of the NAPs, and their continuous improvement, so that they are based on a sound and renewed knowledge of the process. Together with this sound knowledge of the process, the impact of the NAPs should be carefully monitored in order to assess how the strategies and actions implemented are successful in combating desertification.

8. The assessment is ideally based on identification of appropriate physical, biological and socio-economic indicators. It is imperative that a bottom-up approach, drawing on local knowledge, which may yield basic indicators that are understood and applied by local communities, be developed within the particular circumstances of the country Party concerned.

IV. Methodological approaches being used

9. In general terms, indicators can be seen as a measure used to determine, over time, performance of functions, processes and outcomes. The selection of indicators is thus a process that is linked with some perspective but it is not a perspective itself. This means that a concrete conceptual approach to desertification shall be considered as a guide for the selection and use of indicators. In this sense, indicators have an independent life and can be used under different approaches according to different goals. It seems clear that different indicators have been used during the past 30 or more years, even before the consolidation of methodological approaches.

A. Regional Implementation Annex I: Africa

10. Several northern African countries are greatly involved in the implementation of UNCCD and the development and the use of desertification monitoring indicators. The indicators are generally classified using the pressure–state–response–impact (PSRI) model. Moreover, indicators are often illustrated with elaborated products, such as maps, that indicate what kinds of products are needed from the local, national and subregional levels.

11. Two case studies provide a fine example of the use of harmonized methodologies to collect and process data. Some countries and the Desertification Information System for the Mediterranean (DISMED) project have used the same methodology as the Mediterranean Desertification and Land Use (MEDALUS) project to elaborate desertification sensitivity maps. At the regional level, and in order to compare local observations, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) implements the Long Term Ecological Monitoring Observatories Network (ROSELT/OSS) programme with the view to producing local indicators having the same meaning, and hence interpretation. These examples show the relevance of providing standardized and harmonized methodologies to compare results at a larger scale (subregional and regional).

12. It is important to underline the effort made in the subregion to harmonize approaches in order to implement both NAPs and subregional action programmes (SRAPs). In southern Africa, good research projects exist and produce convincing information about indicators (about 225 unique indicators were defined). It is difficult to analyse in depth the results obtained because they are very heterogeneous.

13. The diversity of indicators proposed by the different countries is striking. Seldom is an indicator used in more than one country. Monitoring of various aspects of rainfall and soil properties are the most commonly suggested indicators. This illustrates that issues relating to desertification that are found to be important in the different countries vary widely, which makes it difficult to develop one “universal” core set of desertification indicators. Only in a few cases have countries implemented the suggested indicators.

14. At the regional level, the initiative under the thematic programme network 4 (TPN 4), “Ecological Monitoring, Natural Resources Mapping, Remote Sensing and Early Warning Systems” was launched in Tunis, Tunisia, in October 2002. The focal point is the African Organization of Cartography and Remote Sensing (AOCRS) (<www.oact.dz>).

B. Regional Implementation Annex II: Asia

15. The TPN 1 of Asia, supported by 22 countries of Regional Implementation Annex II, has compiled common sets of benchmarks and indicators for monitoring and assessment of desertification in the Asian region. As a result, a regional desertification mapping at a scale of 1:4,000,000 has been tried for the first time. In fact, many countries in Asia have carried out national and key areas desertification monitoring separate from the TPN 1. Many countries have established national monitoring, observation and information systems to appraise the status and trend of desertification. Apart from some ground observation stations, the nationwide information was obtained from satellite images with ground truth checking for desertification monitoring <www.unccd.int/actionprogrammes/asia/regional/tpn1/menu.php>.

16. The available information can be really relevant to the methodology for assessing desertification. An assessment system based on degree of desertified land has been fully developed, in addition to the regional assessment methodology for land desertification. Research projects have also focused their effort on the desertification mapping.

17. Descriptive information about the environmental context (population pressure, rapid urbanization, natural resources, etc) can be found in the different subregions, but it is not clear how indicators are used by decision makers in the different countries and how they are used to implement NAPs. Sometimes the choice of indicators is limited by the availability of technology and infrastructure for collection, measurement and processing of the data needed to generate a particular indicator. Many of the indicators are amenable to remote sensing and thus are depicted on satellite images.

C. Regional Implementation Annex III: Latin America and the Caribbean

18. A lot of information is available about benchmarks and indicators in the Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) region. Several lists of indicators are provided in each country of the region. Methodologies to collect and process data are heterogeneous and a unique methodology to assess desertification has not yet been achieved. The need to have permanent systems for monitoring and assessing both the processes generating desertification and the effects of drought is imperative in order to help decision-making.

19. The studies undertaken in the region used the driving forces–pressure–state–impact–response (DPSIR) international framework to classify indicators. These indicators essentially deal with biophysical aspects because of the difficulty of obtaining the less numerous socio-economic indicators.

20. As regards the working scales prevailing in identified and developed benchmarks and indicators, national scales dominate to the detriment of local ones. Nevertheless, it is understandable for the scope of experiences carried out in the region which, as mentioned, have headed first towards the organization and consolidation of NAPs to later proceed with minor working scales (local). Even when national working scales are predominant in the region, the concerned actors have done their best to design participatory indicators on the initial actions carried out with local people. Meanwhile, working alliances have been consolidated among scientific and governmental and non-governmental sectors. There are no examples of elaboration of impact indicators at the NAP level.

21. The TPN 1 in LAC was launched in Guatemala in November 2004 and is hosted by Argentina (<www.unccd-deselac.org/english/tpn/tpn1.htm>). The InterAmerican Bank 2003 project “Unified methodology for assessing desertification in Latin America” proposed a list of 43 indicators (biophysical and socio-economic) that were commonly identified and accepted by 6 countries. The national focal points endorsed the indicators.

D. Regional Implementation Annex IV: Northern Mediterranean

22. Based on a complete review of the NAPs from the countries involved in combating desertification in the Northern Mediterranean region (affected and non-affected countries), it is

evident that a lot of interest exists in those countries to better understand desertification processes. Many indicators are available but data about their quantification are not always available. Desert risk mapping is highly heterogeneous. Benchmarks are often not clearly identified.

23. It is important to underline that even if the Northern Mediterranean countries have good research projects and many indicators, these projects and indicators are not so useful for decision makers. Links between indicators and demand are poor. Stakeholders do not take them into account in the implementation of the research projects at national and/or local level, even if the European projects are more and more demand-driven. In fact, stakeholders are often involved in evaluating the indicators at the final stage (for example, DesertLinks) and one can infer that the indicators developed from a scientific point of view cannot really fit with the needs of users and land managers.

24. There is need to bridge the gap between research projects and decision-making. Based on the state of the art in Northern Mediterranean countries, combating desertification in those countries seems to be more a “research problem” than a “sustainable development problem”.

25. In parallel with the research initiatives aimed at defining suitable benchmarks and indicators for the region, there were other initiatives with the objective of promoting the availability, accessibility and circulation of data, the adoption of common standards for monitoring, and databases. In the European Mediterranean region, the availability, accessibility and comparability of data are often the real bottleneck for environmental monitoring, and the choice of effective indicators must consider this.

E. Regional Implementation Annex V: Central and Eastern Europe

26. Most of the countries in the Central and Eastern European region appear to have good databases and monitoring systems covering biophysical aspects such as vegetation cover, soils, soil erosion, hydrology, aridity and air quality, and most of them provide only a comprehensive and descriptive analysis of the biophysical state of desertification. However, some countries have developed more integrated systems of assessment and monitoring at the national level by including available socio-economic data, more specifically for drought management.

27. Human resources, expertise, data sets, technologies, institutions and organizations in this region are available and could allow adequate and more integrated monitoring and assessment systems to be developed quickly.

F. Global assessments

1. The Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands project

28. The objective of the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) project is to assess the causes, status and impact of land degradation in drylands in order to improve decision-making for sustainable development in drylands at local, national, subregional and global levels, and to meet the needs of those involved in the implementation of action programmes under the

Convention. An initial project development facility was put in place to achieve the following aims:

- (a) Review and synthesis of data and information of relevance to the development of land degradation assessment in drylands;
- (b) Development, testing and revision of integrated land degradation assessment approaches and methods;
- (c) Development of capacity and networks for assessing land degradation;
- (d) Conducting pilot studies to calibrate and test methods for assessing land degradation in selected countries;
- (e) Development of strategies for information communication, executive partnership and co-financing;
- (f) Development of a project brief for the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

29. During its first year of work, the LADA project prepared, in collaboration with national partners, an indicator toolbox containing a minimum set of indicators that can be measured at local and global scales, and that allow for extrapolation at these different scales. It also developed two pilot studies – one in China and the other in Kenya – for remote-sensing-based assessment of land degradation based on the analysis of long-term series of normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) data. In the six pilot countries (Argentina, China, Cuba, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia) the existing data sets available were reviewed.

2. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

30. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) made a desktop assessment of the ecosystem services of 10 main global ecosystems, one of them being the drylands. From this work the MA concluded that primary productivity was the most important supporting ecosystem service of the drylands, as it is closely linked to the production of the other main services of those ecosystems in the lands where rain-fed agriculture is being practised. At the same time, noting that desertification was a decrease in the biological and economic productivity of drylands, the MA highlighted that desertification contributes to a persistent reduction in the capacity of the drylands to supply ecosystem services. In conclusion, the MA did not identify indicators per se, but pointed out that as primary productivity is the main ecosystem service of the rain-fed agriculture areas, the MA of desertification in those areas should be based on long-term monitoring in order to measure persistent losses of primary productivity.

31. Desertification is a process that includes a complex chain of cause and effect between biophysical and social factors. The understanding of the phenomenon requires an important effort to integrate the physical, biological and social components of the territory.

32. In this endeavour the LADA project, the MA and the GEF Sustainable Land Management (SLM) have adopted the DPSIR framework analysis, which provides an overall

mechanism for analysing environmental problems. Responses (changes in natural resource management strategies or policies) can be considered at any stage to influence the drivers, pressures and ultimately the state of natural resources and livelihoods.

33. The DPSIR framework analysis states that driving forces exert pressures on the environment and that these pressures can induce changes in its state or condition. The subsequent impacts on socio-economic and biophysical attributes allow society to respond by developing or modifying environmental and economic policies and programmes aimed at preventing, minimizing or mitigating pressures. Indicators can be powerful tools to help identify and monitor DPSIR relationships, both at the assessment stage and subsequently during policy formulation and implementation. The framework provides an overall mechanism for analysing environmental problems, the interconnections of the DPSIR elements and the effectiveness of remedial responses through feedback mechanisms.

34. This framework of analysis is to be complemented with an integrated assessment (IA) – a process meant to treat complex issues through various scientific disciplines while incorporating local, regional and/or national social actors. Participation levels depend on the issue assessed, its range and interaction with the ecosystem, and the spatial scale where the issue develops (local, regional and/or global). The aim is to enhance the vision of society towards environmental interactions and contribute to catalysing socio-environmental changes, thus aiding the communication channels between science and politics. Committing decision makers to consider the results in compliance with those affected by the decisions made is the ultimate solution. This methodology is to be conducted throughout a transparent process open to those engaged in it.

35. IA must provide the scientific and technical support necessary for formulating political decisions, including social, technical and political management. This information has to be properly adapted so as to reach the comprehension levels of decision makers and of social actors involved in the process. The procedure is based on participative planning, approach and integrated assessment to incorporate actors, mainly local communities and decision makers, in desertification affected lands. It may be directed to local, regional and/or national levels, being highly effective at national level for gaining indicators, giving priority to problems and objectives, identifying action and impact hypotheses, and defining actions in an assessment and monitoring system.

36. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, among others, have developed integrated methodologies in the past decades, in search of an integration between the economic and the environment sectors. Such an action-oriented and participative process for monitoring and assessment could be the cornerstone of a concrete way forward and would be in line with recommendations by the CRIC at its fifth session.

37. This overall framework of analysis and assessment can be used for monitoring and assessment of the processes of desertification as well as for the monitoring and assessment of the NAP implementation impact. However, the methodologies are not the only relevant ones and their wide use should not restrain the countries from identifying more pertinent methodologies for their work. Those frameworks of analysis are often combined with methodological

approaches such as the ecosystem approach (for example, LADA), the ecosystem services approach (such as MA) or the sustainable livelihood approach for the main currently used methodological approaches.

V. Is the information on benchmarks and indicators available?

38. Various programmes, projects and initiatives provide ample evidence for the availability of information on benchmarks and indicators, as well as the use made thereof. So far country Parties have only been able to reach an agreement on common elements for a methodology to define and implement benchmarks and indicators within the Convention framework. However, at the regional level the first important steps have been made in developing common systems of benchmarks and indicators. Important work was undertaken in reviewing existing monitoring systems of desertification (Active Exchange of Experience on Indicators and Development of Perspectives in the context of the UNCCD (AID-CCD), LADA) and defining and measuring indicators at the regional or global level (LADA, DesertLinks, OSS, DISMED, etc).

39. The initiatives to establish a baseline of indicators that have been implemented in the regions have already produced several common sets of indicators that are able to fulfil the expectations of countries. Furthermore, all kinds of indicators for assessing and monitoring desertification are available, and each country Party could select its own basic ones to suit the prevailing circumstances.

40. At the national level NAPs may not be efficiently implemented if a concrete way to monitor and assess their impact and implementation is not put in place. Therefore many country Parties have developed desertification and/or NAP implementation impact monitoring and assessment systems based on different benchmarks and indicators. Nevertheless these systems are still under development. They often do not include participatory processes and the integration of the data in a multi-scalar approach from the local level to the global level is facing difficulties. Those experiences should not be disregarded but instead scaled up, enriched and communicated through exchange of information and of technologies so that each country Party can tailor its own set of benchmarks and indicators for NAP implementation. Resource implications must be clarified and capacities strengthened.

41. It is therefore noteworthy that there are some sets of indicators and related data that were agreed upon within countries and among countries in various regions and subregions of the world, for the monitoring and assessment of both the process of desertification and the NAP impact. Some indicators could be used by the country Parties in their reports on the implementation of the Convention.

VI. Current operating framework

42. For the biennium 2006–2007, the COP placed benchmarks and indicators on the top of the agenda, as the most urgent activity. Decisions 1/COP.7, 4/COP.7, 8/COP.7, 15/COP.7, 17/COP.7, 19/COP.7 and 20/COP.7 underline the breadth of coverage of the topic at the seventh session of the COP. There are major issues that were discernible from the COP decisions:

(a) The need to further develop the country profiles with a selection of simplified, consistent and efficient measurable indicators for reporting by affected and developed country Parties;

(b) The request to the GoE to undertake its work programme on benchmarks and indicators, paying special attention to participatory and integrated approaches to benchmark and indicator systems and with a view to defining quantified, time-bound and costed targets.

A. The country profile

43. It is noteworthy that during CRIC 3, the country profile was welcomed as a promising tool for presenting data on the implementation of the Convention. Moving from sporadic and scattered information to harmonized, reliable statistics would assist the strengthening of the assessment capacity of the national coordinating bodies, and also facilitate the review of the UNCCD process.

44. The objectives of the tool were defined as follows:

(a) To monitor and assess in a participatory manner the status of land degradation and combating desertification covering both the biophysical and the socio-economic parameters;

(b) To ensure comparability of results over the years in areas of specific importance to the Convention;

(c) To strengthen preparedness and the effectiveness of measures taken to implement the Convention;

(d) To enhance civil society participation in the implementation of the Convention.

45. By its decision 8/COP.7, the COP created an Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) to improve the procedures for communication of information, particularly at the national level, as well as the quality and format of reports on the implementation of the Convention. According to its terms of reference, the AHWG was charged to provide:

(a) A proposal of a selection of simplified, consistent and efficient measurable indicators for reporting by affected and developed country Parties;

(b) Clarification of the role of benchmarks and indicators in reporting;

(c) Clarification of the role of country profiles in national reporting and possible improvements in their use.

46. Moreover, the COP invited the CST to advance progress in standardization of systems and data and information for the monitoring and assessment of land degradation and desertification, and to assist in establishing standardized formats for biophysical and socio-economic indicators to be used in the formulation of country profiles.

47. In the emerging effort of the UNCCD to project a strategic vision and renew or improve procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and format of reports, the quality of objectively verifiable indicators takes on major importance. The problem is not the lack of indicators but selecting the ones to suit a given country Party. It would be essential to have proper calibration of indicators at the various levels, in order to both strengthen the NAP implementation and better understand the desertification processes.

B. Recommendations of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention at its fifth session

48. At its fifth session, the CRIC emphasised the need to have outcome-oriented indicators at national level. Furthermore the CRIC made two related calls:

(a) For further identification of the spatial distribution of poverty, combined with an emphasis on landscape units for assessment of human impact on land systems, undertaken in conjunction with local authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and with feedback for communities, in order to implement remedial approaches to degradation and desertification;

(b) For integrated systems on parameters and indicators for assessing the risks of drought and desertification and establishing scales of vulnerability in support of a strategic framework aimed at reducing vulnerability to both gradual and abrupt environmental changes. By clarifying causal relationships at multiple scales the indicators can enable the course of more informed territorial interventions by regional and local stakeholders

49. These two calls show a clear need to move from the classical way in which monitoring and assessment have been dealt with in the UNCCD context, to a more integrated and pragmatic approach. An improved country profile could take into account such preoccupations by promoting an up-to-date framework of analysis that would help the countries to achieve integrated, action-oriented and participatory monitoring and assessment.

C. Need for consistency and coherence

50. It also emerges that there is a clear need for coherence among the different scales and programmes developed on benchmarks and indicators (see decisions 1/COP.7 and 19/COP.7). For instance, the UNCCD methodological monitoring instruments that the CST is promoting (including under the GoE, the AHWG on reporting process and the country profile), the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) and SLM indicators and/or the LADA indicators, should be all developed in such a way that they enrich and complement each other.

51. Clearly consistency in approach across the different programmes would serve the country Parties well. If an adequate system of indicators and benchmarks is provided, an improved country profile could be also used as part of a monitoring and planning system at the national level, at the same time improving data quality. However, the country profile will be more useful if it is part of an overall national initiative for NAP/desertification/multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) or environmental monitoring. Moreover, countries that are developing both NAPs under the UNCCD and national adaptation programmes of action (NAPAs) under the

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) may be encouraged to articulate synergy approaches in addressing the issue of vulnerability to the phenomena of climate change and desertification.

VII. The suggested way forward

A. The scope

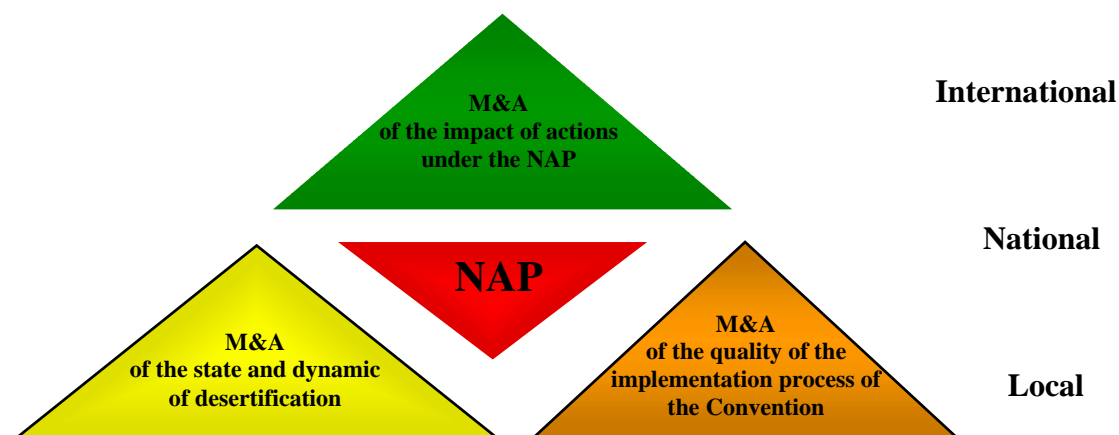
52. From the past work on benchmarks and indicators within the context of the CST, it appears that there is a need to clearly define which types of indicators have to be developed. From the figure below three main types of monitoring and assessment are distinguishable:

(a) Monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the Convention, with indicators referred to as implementation indicators that show how the recommendations of the Convention were adopted and implemented at the national level through the NAPs. This is more related to assessment than monitoring;

(b) Monitoring and assessment of the impact of the implementation of the NAPs, with indicators referred to as impact indicators that should allow assessment of how the NAP implementation changed the on-ground situation;

(c) Monitoring and assessment of the processes of desertification at the national level.

Figure. UNCCD NAP: What should be monitored and assessed?



Note: M&A = monitoring and assessment

Source: OSS – GTZ – UNCCD

53. It is noteworthy that the monitoring and assessment of the impact of the implementation of the Convention means a follow-up of the efforts to combat desertification that implies a sound monitoring and assessment of all the processes involved. Therefore the indicators of the processes and impacts of the NAP implementation are intrinsically interlinked.

54. An action-oriented analytical approach to addressing the problem of desertification based on an IA process and the DPSIR framework of analysis could help to define an efficient monitoring and assessment system of NAP implementation and, therefore identifying NAP impact indicators linked to indicators of the dynamic state and trends of desertification. This approach would be based on an active contribution to the improvement of the reporting process of the Convention through the development of an adequate and adapted country profile.

55. The main problem with the indicators on the implementation of the Convention at all levels may not be to identify indicators, but to get a common political agreement and a common logical framework of understanding of causes and consequences of desertification, so that one can define what should be monitored, in order to assess the quality of the process of implementation of the Convention. It would be necessary to assist, as appropriate, the AHWG in its work on this issue, linking the impact indicators with those of implementation, so that there is a continuous iterative amelioration process between the three types of monitoring and assessment.

B. The concept

56. Any further development on monitoring and assessment in the Convention framework should take into consideration the above-mentioned context and, more specifically, decisions and recommendations adopted during the COPs and CRIC 5, the existing information, the available methodologies (notably the integrated assessment and DPSIR), the need to have country-tailored monitoring and assessment, and the need for comparability of information at the regional and global levels.

57. In this context, the further development of the country profile as a powerful tool for providing a first set of common benchmarks and indicators on the desertification processes and on the impact of NAP implementation, as an incentive for further work on this issue, is deemed imperative, particularly at the level of each country Party. A model country profile could be proposed consisting of three parts:

- (a) A small set of commonly used and basic indicators relevant to all country Parties;
- (b) Regional indicators taking into account the regionally agreed frameworks for assessment and the contributions made by the TPNs;
- (c) A flexible part for a country specific approach based on a nationally identified framework for the monitoring and assessment of desertification, using basic commonly agreed principles of work and integrating the local level experiences.

58. The country profile, while ensuring comparability of results over the years in areas of specific importance to the Convention (global, regional and national), would be flexible enough to enable each country to develop its own benchmark and indicator system, taking into account its national context and integrating local level experiences.

59. The first part could be implemented immediately through the selection of commonly used basic indicators, such as aridity index, vegetation cover, land use, and population growth, using

the classical available databases in most of the countries and/or at the global level, and using the earth observation systems. This small set of indicators would allow each country to have a first overview with standardized, harmonized and comparable information.

60. The second part will depend on the involvement of each country in some regional level or subregional level agreements on benchmark and indicator monitoring and assessment. It would be based on the results of work in identifying common benchmarks and indicators at the regional and subregional levels. More specifically, the results of the TPN 1 in LAC and TPN 4 in Asia, and results of the work of subregional projects, could be immediately integrated in the country profile for the use of the countries that endorse those frameworks. And it would strengthen the TPNs.

61. The concept for the third part would, in line with recommendations of the COP and the CRIC, be based on a more pragmatic and systemic approach of the phenomenon using the above-described IA process. The idea would be to develop a logical framework using a list of causes and consequences, using the DPSIR, that would allow the manageable constraints and possible actions to be identified. The problem definition for establishing these logical frameworks is based on a participatory approach involving all stakeholders and including socio-economic rather than biophysical direct and indirect drivers. These logical frameworks would facilitate the definition of concrete indicators using the DPSIR, and the definition of an assessment model, and would be action-oriented. The priority would be given to affected areas.

62. Several guidelines were developed for implementing such a methodology and could be reviewed (e.g. work of OSS and the Argentine Institute for Research on Arid Zones (IADIZA)). This process would be a low-cost process as most of the information is already there and would mostly be reoriented into a more target-oriented and pragmatic way. It would be beneficial because it would give countries a tool that would allow them to comply with the Convention recommendations and further develop strategic planning based on a sound understanding of the processes and of the impacts of action. Eventually, the flexibility of the tool would make it adaptable to existing frameworks and methodologies.

63. In a second phase, such an action-oriented methodology would better allow concrete targets to be developed. For instance, a good understanding of the process will permit the key drivers of the social, economical and biophysical vulnerability of the affected territory to be identified. Therefore a concrete hierarchy of the priorities can be established with concrete actions to be taken.

64. The further elaboration of the country profile would, at the same time, allow the definition of indicators about the implementation of the Convention, together with the AHWG on reporting, to be considered. The definition of those indicators could be substantially helped through a sound review of the indicators proposed in the document A/AC.241/INF.4.

65. At the regional level it would be interesting to begin to define a regional profile that would take advantage of the data gathered for the elaboration of the country profiles. This regional profile would allow a better comprehension of the major processes and capacities to face the challenge of combating desertification in each annex. The TPNs could be a major

stakeholder at this level by enhancing the sharing of information and technologies, the compiling data and the drafting reports, and facilitating exchanges of human resources.

C. The objective

66. Improving the country profile as specified in decision 8/COP.7 could have the main objective of triggering an assessment by the countries based on a simple and logical comprehension of the processes. Specific objectives would be:

(a) To develop a model country profile in three step: a small set of commonly used and basic indicators relevant to all country Parties; a proposal for a regional approach enforcing the role of the TPNs; and a proposal for guidelines for the definition of a flexible part based on a country specific and nationally identified framework and integrating local level experiences;

(b) To increase the coherence and consistency between the different tools developed by institutions working on benchmarks and indicators, taking into consideration all relevant initiative, including TPNs, GEF SLM, MA, LADA and NAPAs under UNFCCC;

(c) To facilitate the identification of NAP implementation indicators in close consultation with the AHWG and in line with the proposed country profile;

(d) To encourage participatory and integrated approaches involving all stakeholders in the development, where required, and in the use of benchmarks and indicators at appropriate scales.

67. The suggested concrete targets and engagements would be as follows:

(a) In the short term:

- (i) An improved help guide for reporting is ready for COP 9;
- (ii) At least one country per regional implementation annex engages itself in incorporating benchmarks and indicators in the country profile before COP 9.

(b) In the medium term:

- (i) Fifty per cent of the affected country Parties have incorporated benchmarks and indicators in their country profiles before COP 10, using as a baseline the pilot countries of the first phase;
- (ii) Indicators are institutionalized at the national level in at least two countries per regional implementation annex, in the framework of the reporting process, before COP 10.

(c) In the long term:

- (i) The affected country parties have incorporated benchmarks and indicators in their national reports as a normal tool for reporting on the state of desertification and the impacts of the NAP implementation;

- (ii) The affected countries have institutionalized their benchmarks and indicators through a participatory approach, considering the needs and propositions of all stakeholders;
- (iii) The impacts of local level experiences were taken into account and assessed through the country reports and they can be considered as lessons learned to combat desertification.

D. The strategic actions up to the next session of the Conference of the Parties

68. In order to attain the objective mentioned above, a working group could be established. It would work closely with the Parties, taking into account the outcomes of the AHWG on reporting and the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG), and in collaboration with LADA, the TPNs, the GEF and all other relevant stakeholders. The work would be product-oriented for delivering a concrete profile based on existing and already reviewed and compiled knowledge. The working group would draft the new country profile. The LADA project would be requested to service the process and provide a minimum set of common indicators, as indicated for the first part of the country profile.

69. An instruction manual and a tool-kit would be prepared to help the affected country Parties in the elaboration of their country profiles. It would include methodological guidelines for the elaboration of the third part, including a clear presentation of the conceptual approach. Contact details of key institutions ready to help countries and focal points in these institutions would be listed in the country profile.

70. The draft would be tested in pilot countries in collaboration with voluntary contributing projects. Consultations would be made with the countries in order to ensure congruence with NAPs, SRAPs and regional action programmes (RAPs), and the results of the first phase would be presented at CRIC 7.

71. In a second phase, the profile would be revised taking into account the main lessons learned from the pilot countries and results of the consultations. Notably, recommendations should be made on how targets could be derived from the use of the country profile, on capacity-building needs arising from the use of the country profile and on the possible development of a regional country profile with the TPNs. An effort should be made to further develop implementation indicators, taking into account the work of the AHWG and the IIWG. The end products would be presented during COP 9 with conclusions and recommendations.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

72. Bearing in mind the recommendations of the Bureau of the CST on this subject, the Committee may wish to consider how guidelines on the use of benchmarks and indicators in national reports and country profiles may be prepared, and to focus on providing these guidelines for consideration during the next session of the CST, as a way to proceed on this matter.

73. Moreover, follow-up work by the CST on benchmarks and indicators needs to reflect previous initiatives and further elaborate on a consensus for an integrated framework for assessment to be used in supporting the NAPs, with a clearly earmarked budget.

74. On the basis of the work of the GoE and of the AHWG, the CST may wish to advise on terms of reference for the further elaboration of the country profile, as recommended by the Bureau of the CST and the GoE.

75. The CST may also wish to recommend attainment of coherence among the regional and global approaches for monitoring desertification, and to underline the need to integrate the country profile in an overall initiative for NAP/desertification/MEA and environment monitoring systems.
