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**Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention**

**Twelfth session**

Windhoek, Namibia, 17–26 September 2013

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies**

**Draft action plan for coordinated action in the drylands  
(to implement recommendations of the Global Drylands  
Report)**

**Note by the secretariat\***

*Summary*

By its decision 9/COP.10, paragraphs 14 and 15, the Conference of the Parties (COP) took note of the proposed coordinated action of the United Nations System in the drylands, as contained in document ICCD/CRIC(10)/INF.1, and called upon the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Environment Management Group (EMG), to work on a concrete action plan for 2012–2018 for promoting and strengthening relationships with other international organizations, institutions and agencies. The COP also encouraged the secretariat, in consultation with Parties, to provide the COP at its eleventh session with recommendations to follow up on the afore-mentioned action plan.

Pursuant to this mandate, this document contains the main elements of the action plan drawn up at working meetings on land-related issues, particularly the one held in Bonn on the sidelines of the eleventh session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention in April 2013. The draft action plan includes an outline of goals and objectives and an overview of the components of a coherent process leading to the accomplishment of concrete results as envisaged in the referred document ICCD/CRIC(10)/INF.1.

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\* Please note that the text of the present document is issued in the form in which it was provided to the secretariat with minor editing.

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## I. Background and mandate

1. By its decision 9/COP.10, paragraphs 14 and 15, the Conference of the Parties (COP) took note of the proposed coordinated action of the United Nations system in the drylands, as contained in document ICCD/CRIC(10)/INF.1, and called upon the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Environment Management Group (EMG), to work on a concrete action plan for 2012–2018 for promoting and strengthening relationships with other international organizations, institutions and agencies. The COP also encouraged the secretariat, in consultation with Parties, to provide the COP at its eleventh session (COP 11) with recommendations to follow up on the afore-mentioned action plan.

2. In accordance with the mandate given by the COP at its tenth session and the relevant decisions of the 12th special session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council and the 18th EMG Senior Officials Meeting, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat is leading the development of this action plan under the Issue Management Group (IMG) on Land of the EMG.

3. The UNCCD secretariat, in consultation with United Nations agencies and other international bodies during 2012 and 2013, developed a concept note for the action plan and presented it to the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) at its eleventh session, for feedback from Parties. Based on this feedback, as well as on further input from the agencies constituting the EMG, a draft action plan was developed to be presented to the twelfth session of the CRIC and COP 11.

## II. Annotated outline

4. **Long-term goal:** to reduce the area of degraded drylands in order to attain a land degradation neutral world.

5. **Vision of the action plan:** a global partnership working to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation

6. **Objective:** to enable the implementation of the recommendations of the Global Drylands Report<sup>1</sup> (GDR) through the identification of specific target areas in drylands (STADs).

7. **Activities to attain objectives:**

(A start-up or beta phase of the action plan would test the framework through a limited sample of STADs for each geographical region, identify successful sustainable land management (SLM) and rehabilitation initiatives and examine the exportability of their approaches to other similar areas)

- Identification of relevant stakeholders in STADs
- Establish a sample of geographically representative STADs within aligned national action programmes (NAPs). / Select an initial set of STADs for the start-up phase of the action plan
- Establish time framed specific targets quantifying the reversal of land degradation.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, Environment Management Group “Global Drylands: a UN system-wide response”.

## A. Components of the action plan

8. The action plan has five major process/instrumentation components: (a) an effective linking of existing frameworks, initiatives and international agencies through a steering group; (b) the identification of successful approaches and methodologies in areas that have potential exportability; (c) the development of selection criteria for the identification of potential critical STADs; (d) the presentation of recommendations to governments (through the CRIC and the COP) for the selection of the first tranche of the STADs; and (e) monitoring progress in the implementation of STADs according to prescribed performance indicators.

### 1. Component 1. The effective linking of existing frameworks and international agencies through an ad hoc virtual steering group

9. This ad hoc group would be derived from the vast array of international entities, both within and without the United Nations system, that are already undertaking initiatives on drylands in a broad range of areas.

### 2. Component 2. Identification of successful approaches and methodologies in areas which have potential exportability

10. International entities interested in implementing the action plan, will be called to identify or develop criteria of success and their exportability of actions in dryland areas that have been transformed through sustainable land management.

### 3. Component 3. Development of selection criteria for the identification of potential critical STADs

11. Using their accumulated collective knowledge on drylands management and development, the ad hoc virtual steering group will adopt a set of criteria for the selection of a number of potential critical STADs.

### 4. Component 4. Presentation of recommendations to governments (through the CRIC and the COP) for the selection of the start-up sample of the STADs

12. Interested governments will propose selection criteria for the STADs to the COP or the CRIC. The proposals would be weighed against the criteria adopted by these bodies upon the advice of the international scientific and best practice network.

### 5. Component 5. Monitoring progress in the implementation of activities in the STADs according to prescribed performance indicators

13. The ad hoc virtual steering group would be charged with preparing an annual progress report, following the approved performance indicators, on the implementation of initiatives in the STADs for the Committee of Science and Technology (CST) and the CRIC.

## B. The action plan rationale

14. Existing successful initiatives to address land degradation in drylands confirm that:
- Investing in SLM and land restoration is profitable
  - Investing in SLM and rehabilitation is the best approach to fighting poverty and protecting natural capital

- Methodologies and approaches used in these initiatives can be replicated in adjacent or similar areas
- When precise objectives and targets are met, people realize that change is possible through innovative practices; new opportunities open up and act as self-propelled community drivers that magnify the initial knowledge, networking and investments

15. The usual channels for the exchange of scientific information and policy coordination in drylands management are challenged, both by the multiplicity of actors with competing agendas, and also by the different institutional mandates.

16. STADs would galvanize concrete collaboration at a national level, elicit support from the international community, integrate scientific and traditional knowledge, promote civil society action, and attract private sector investment and local community leadership, to address dryland SLM and rehabilitation initiatives.

17. The draft action plan proposes a coherent process to harness existing and proven knowledge and know-how at international, national and local levels, and to apply it pointedly and measurably to accomplish tangible concrete goals. The plan proposes to identify transferable successful development and management experiences in drylands to similar areas, in order to scale up the process within a time based programme.

### **III. Overview of the draft action plan**

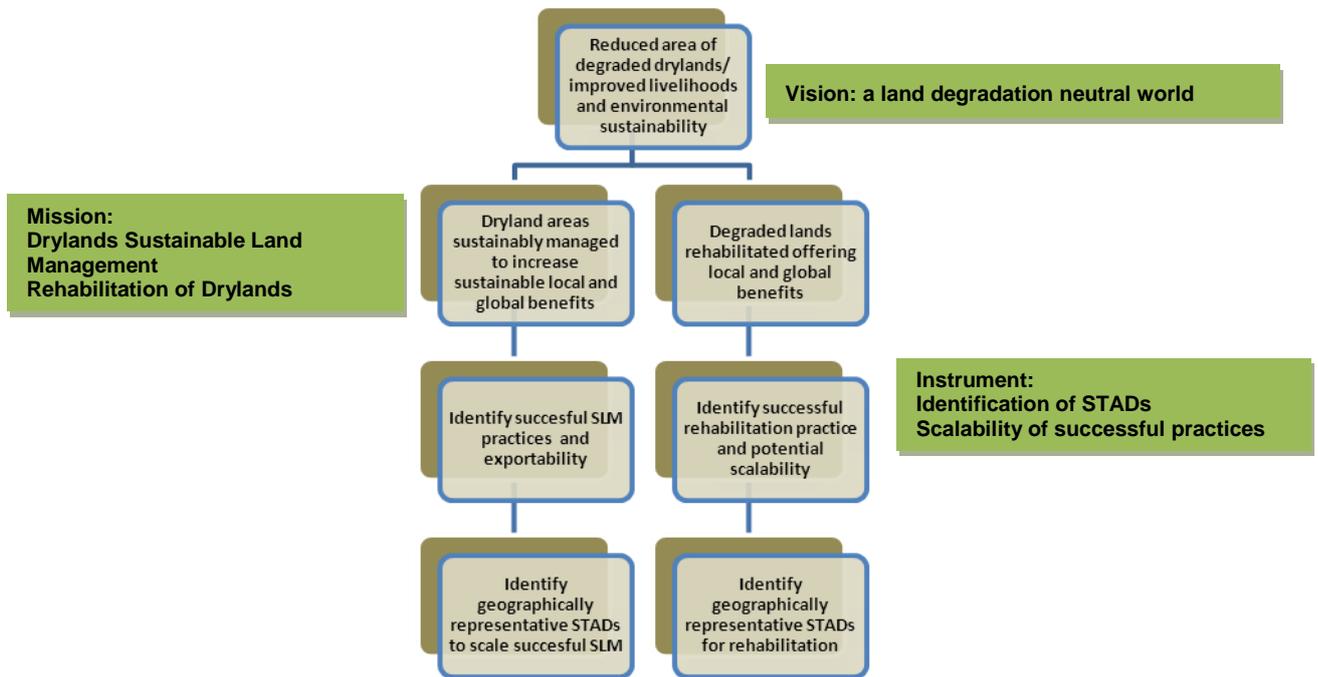
18. The long-term goal of the action plan is to reduce degraded areas of drylands in order to attain a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development to improve livelihoods, food security and environmental sustainability.

19. The vision of the action plan is a global partnership working to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.

20. A further objective of the action plan is to enable the implementation of the recommendations of the GDR through the identification of STADs within the national action programmes (NAPs) where effective collaboration between local, national and international mechanisms can attain measurable, time-framed and comparable concrete results in the reduction of degraded lands.

21. The action plan would be initiated through a start-up or beta phase to test the framework through a limited sample of STADs for each geographical region, in order to enable adjustment of the different components, fine tune selection criteria and determine effectiveness of implementation.

Figure 1  
A visual synthesis of the action plan



The long-term goal of the action plan is a land degradation neutral world attained through the reduction of the area of degraded drylands by Sustainable Land Management (SLM) and rehabilitation initiatives that would lead to improved livelihoods for people living in the arid lands and to environmental sustainability. The instrument to accelerate the reduction of degraded drylands is strategic geographical targeting based on the scaling up of existing successful practices.

### Activities to attain objectives

22. The main activities to attain the above-mentioned objectives include:

- (a) Identifying successful SLM and rehabilitation initiatives and examining the exportability of their approaches to other similar areas. This would provide a dynamic focus to synergize the international, national and local community components and promote scalability of successful practices;
- (b) Identifying relevant stakeholders within the STADs;
- (c) Establishing, within a sample of geographically representative aligned NAPs, STADs where concrete and measurable indicators could be applied for SLM and land rehabilitation initiatives. The STADs would be selected by national authorities in charge of the NAP process on the basis of criteria and guidance of the COP or the CRIC/CST as appropriate;
- (d) Providing time-framed specific targets quantifying the reversal of land degradation trends towards the goal of a land degradation neutral world; enabling the determination of progress in recapitalizing drylands, thereby increasing performance and impact measurement which are central tenets of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to

enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy) of UNCCD and the aligned NAPs.

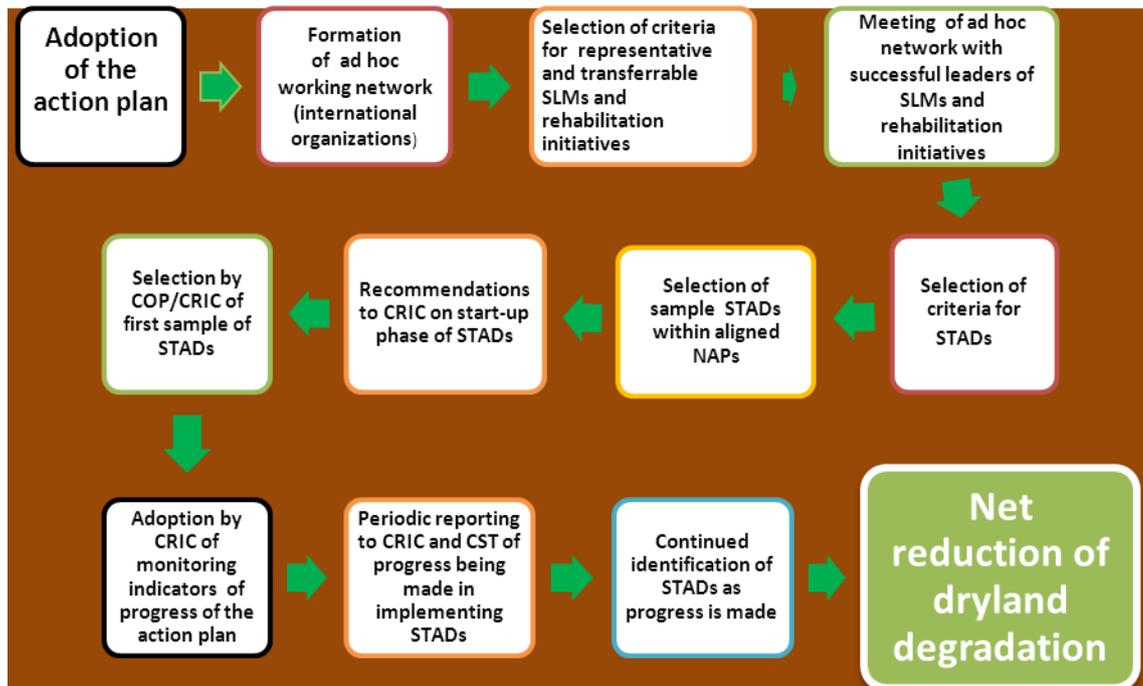
#### **IV. Components of the action plan**

23. The action plan has five major functional components: (a) an effective linking of existing frameworks and international agencies into a functional ad hoc network to assess the most successful SLM and rehabilitation initiatives in dryland areas, which would include developing criteria of the environmental impact and cost effectiveness, as well as the social and economic returns of the initiatives, (b) the identification of those approaches and methodologies in areas that are potentially exportable to similar environmental and socioeconomic settings, (c) the development of selection criteria for the identification of potential critical STADs within existing NAPs and the adoption of suitable performance indicators through the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS), (d) the presentation of recommendations to governments (through the CRIC and the COP) for the selection of the first tranche of the STADs, and (e) monitoring progress in the implementation of STADs according to prescribed performance indicators.

##### **A. Component 1. Creation of an effective linking of existing frameworks and international agencies into a functional ad hoc network**

24. This ad hoc network would be derived from the vast array of international entities, both within and without the United Nations system, that are already undertaking initiatives on drylands in a broad range of areas including scientific knowledge exchange, integrated sustainable development planning, assessment of local environmental knowledge in dryland communities, performance indicators of progress in SLM, restoration and rehabilitation technologies, promotion of investments in dryland areas, mapping of critical areas and identification of crosscutting issues (climate change, food security, biodiversity, economic development).

Figure 2  
Flow of the action plan process



25. UNCCD would take decisions regarding the selection of STADs and evaluate the overall performance of the action plan.

26. The technical facilitation could be undertaken by one of the scientific/technical bodies participating in the network in the same way that the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) manages the project Support to GEF Eligible Parties for Alignment of National Action Programmes and Reporting Process.

27. The ad hoc virtual steering group would not add another layer of complexity to the coordination actions already in existence but would rather be a zooming mechanism using STADs as convergence points. By focusing on STADs as priority areas, a wide variety of diverse interests and concerns of different participating entities could be harnessed to support the sustainable development of the designated dryland areas. The policy tools envisaged are the NAPs and national frameworks on sustainable development.

28. Likewise, the ad hoc virtual steering group will not create additional resource demands but rather align existing initiatives around specific focuses, that is, the STADs will be the crosscutting space for local action.

## B. Component 2. Identification of approaches and methodologies in successful areas which have potential exportability

29. International entities, aligned through the network, will develop success and exportability criteria for those dryland areas that have been transformed through sustainable development, that is, where environmental and socioeconomic productivity now prevail over degraded drylands.

30. The success and exportability criteria for the areas will take into consideration ecosystem characteristics, social and economic structure, political governance context, and cost-effectiveness. They will also assess the mechanisms by which implementation on-the-ground takes into account the corresponding regional context and the national priorities under the sustainable development agenda.

31. This process would yield: (a) a selection of the most successful SLM and rehabilitation initiatives within representative geographical regions and ecosystems, (b) the determination of the underlying factors that enabled their accomplishment, (c) a determination of their social, environmental and economic impact, (d) their cost and sources of financing, (e) a mapping of the actors and social agents participating in their implementation at all levels, and (f) an assessment of the exportability of their approaches to similar areas.

32. Applying the agreed criteria the group will then advance recommendations identifying a set of successful areas of dryland management and development with potential exportability to similar ecosystem and socioeconomic environments and taking into account geographical representativeness.

### **C. Component 3. Development of selection criteria for the identification of potentially critical specific target areas in drylands**

33. Using their accumulated collective knowledge on dryland management and development, the ad hoc virtual steering group will adopt a set of criteria for the selection of a number of potentially critical STADs. The following elements would be analysed within the STADs to be identified: environmental and socioeconomic factors, relationship with food security, population dependent on area, interlinkages and impacts to adjacent areas and ecosystems, empowerment status of local communities, governance context at national and local levels, feasibility of positive results, potential costs, and potential sources of public and private investment. The ad hoc virtual steering group, using a process similar to the United Nations REDD, would promote the informed and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, national in the implementation of the STADs.

34. The selection criteria must be developed to ensure that the STADs specific attainments can generate incremental, structural and transformational change at both national and global levels. As there is no universal solution to dryland degradation issues, a range of possible responses must be reflected in the selection criteria.

### **D. Component 4. Presentation of recommendations by Parties for the selection of the start-up sample of the specific target areas in drylands**

35. Parties will submit proposals for STADs selection by the COP or the CRIC. These proposals would be weighed against criteria adopted by these bodies upon the advice that may be provided by the CST.

36. Parties will also submit an estimated timetable to achieve the stated STAD goals, comparable performance indicators to allow periodic monitoring and evaluation of progress and an overview of the groundwork steps, policies, available knowledge and institutional resources in situ, as well as investments and community level action that would be necessary to set the initiatives in motion.

## **E. Component 5. Monitoring progress in the implementation of activities in the specific target areas in drylands according to prescribed performance indicators**

37. The ad hoc virtual steering group would be responsible for preparing an annual progress report, following approved performance indicators, on the implementation of initiatives in the STADs to the CST and the CRIC as appropriate.

38. The table below illustrates the steps and estimated timetable for the continued development of the action plan. It must be noted that no significant additional costs would be associated with the operations of the ad hoc virtual steering group as their meetings could take place through virtual networks or during participation in other international meetings.

## **V. The action plan rationale**

### **A. The Global Drylands Report and an emerging new paradigm on drylands**

39. The GDR focused on various audiences, with specific aims: (a) The United Nations agencies themselves, to clarify the commitment made to drylands and act as a reference guide;(b) the governments of developed and developing countries, as a normative guide on the position of the United Nations on, and commitment to, the development of drylands; (c) the private sector and donors, to encourage and inspire them to think about the viability and unique opportunities presented by drylands, and (d) civil society organizations, to encourage advocacy on the development of drylands, and empowerment of their populations.

40. The narrative on drylands that emanates from the GDR shifts from an emphasis on negative images of land degradation, to one of developmental challenge and opportunity.

### **B. Enhancing coordination at national and international levels**

41. Dryland restoration and SLM require particularly extensive interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary (cross-cutting) approaches. The usual channels for the exchange of scientific information and policy coordination are however challenged, by the presence of a multiplicity of actors at local, national and international levels, most with competing perspectives and agendas that stem from each of their particular institutional mandates, making convergence of effort and multi-disciplinary coordination difficult.

42. Coordination and coherence are absolutely necessary to develop efficient and effective approaches for dryland management. These must recognize the capacities of local communities in the sustainable management of their natural resources, in line with broader national and international contexts.

43. NAPs, aligned with The Strategy as required by the UNCCD, offer a national overarching framework for dryland management in which policy, national coordination and intergovernmental alignments are prioritized. Specific targeted initiatives within these frameworks would strengthen the implementation of NAPs.

44. On the other hand, the, United Nations system would offer an integrative and consultative platform for the various agendas and cross-cutting issues that impinge on

drylands, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, food security, energy, water and so on.

45. There is, however, disparity between national and international platforms and strategies in the responses at the local level. Action needs to be integrated, especially the one undertaken by national governments, regional organizations, bilateral aid agencies, local communities, non-governmental/civil society organizations, and private sector at various levels, to increase coordination that can yield the concrete outcomes envisaged.

### **C. Factors for successful dryland initiatives**

46. The most successful SLM and restoration efforts in drylands have depended on clear overall national/international governance cooperation approaches and strong leadership and participation by the community, either to galvanize broader external support, when the initiative is endogenous or to make possible the project when the drivers are external. Successful dryland projects, as evidenced from the assessment of existing best practices, require a coordinated input of at least three key players: central government, international organizations and communities.

47. The role of government is to reduce policy barriers and strengthen incentives to engage socially sustainable practices. International agencies, donors and NGOs besides providing financial and technical support, influence government reforms that enable favorable policies and help integrate cross-cutting issues. Finally, communities, who are the main actors, implementers and beneficiaries, must be open to incorporating new knowledge to enhance local know-how.

48. The action plan posits that national coordination frameworks enhanced by STADs, would provide a platform for collaboration that harnesses energy and resources.

### **D. Targeting helps achieve sustainable development goals**

49. Targeting helps international campaigns to be more focused and thereby achieve their sustainable development goals. In 2011 the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration launched a campaign to target the restoration of 1.5 million km<sup>2</sup> of lost forest by the year 2020. Participating countries then identified specific geographic areas to implement the target. By mid-2012, five hundred thousand km<sup>2</sup> had already been firmly targeted through pledges in every part of the world.

50. Creating a targeted and measurable action plan to implement the GDR recommendations could offer a concrete platform to identify most critical areas and to bring together the international, national and local community components which are essential to deal effectively with dryland degradation.

51. Identifying STADs will stimulate concrete collaboration at a national level; elicit support from the international community; integrate scientific and traditional knowledge; promote civil society action; attract private sector investment and local community leadership, in order to promote dryland SLM and rehabilitation initiatives.

52. Existing strategies such as the integrated financing strategies developed by the Global Mechanism would help mobilize an investment framework for the selected STADs in the start-up phase of the action plan.

53. The STADs' targeted and measurable nature makes it possible to increase return on investments. This investment-friendly character can be further facilitated with the implementation of integrated financing strategies that include innovative resource

mobilization efforts, for example with the private sector, and by promoting public resource allocations in national expenditure frameworks.

54. The action plan would harness knowledge exchange on SLM and rehabilitation of drylands from successful national initiatives which are being spearheaded and/or supported by: the United Nations system, the GEF, the Bonn Challenge, European Union programmatic actions of the Directorate General on Research and on the Environment (among other initiatives, European Cooperation in Science and Technology), TerrAfrica, International Union for Conservation of Nature, World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies, the World Bank and regional banks, government ministries, local communities, civil society organizations and the private sector.

55. Focusing the action plan on specific target areas would facilitate the exchange of scientific knowledge of multi-disciplinary natural resource management institutions and experts with local environmental knowledge as well as governance frameworks that enable and integrate the specific areas within wider national and global contexts.

56. Although there is a multiplicity of subnational, national and international instruments now in place, contributing to the dryland management and development agenda, there is nevertheless evidence of the continuing deterioration of drylands.

57. The potential to reverse this trend exists and has been demonstrated in many instances, through innovative and successful initiatives on every continent. The challenge is to replicate and scale up these achievements. To accomplish this, we need to address more efficient ways to allow for the replication of successful approaches in similar ecological and socioeconomic environments, through knowledge sharing and targeted coordinated responses, between international, national and local action levels.

58. In the face of rising public deficits and shrinking public resources, strategic geographical targeting may be a viable way to harness resources for sustainable dryland management in developing countries. Targeted measurable successful initiatives create a momentum to recapitalize drylands and generate self-sustaining resources that attract more public and private sector investments.

## VI. Conclusions

**59. Local successes interact and naturally spread to adjacent similar areas as nearby communities learn and appreciate the benefits from the application of new approaches and methodologies to reduce degradation, increase productivity and rehabilitate lost vital resources.**

**60. A growing body of empirical observations and scientific understanding of the transformational processes in the intricate ecological and socioeconomic contexts that constitute the dryland environments, have revealed that when precise objectives and targets are met, that is, when people realize that change is possible and within reach through innovative practices, new opportunities and aspirations emerge in communities. As such, these act like self-propelled drivers that magnify the initial knowledge, networking efforts and investments.**

**61. The action plan proposes a coherent process with which to harness existing and proven knowledge and know-how at the international, national and local levels, and to apply it pointedly and measurably to accomplish tangible concrete goals. The plan proposes mechanisms that can identify transferable successful development and management experiences in drylands to similar areas, and scale up the process within a time based programme.**

**62. The action plan would enable quantifiable and comparable indicators of progress and facilitate knowledge transfer. By offering tangible indicators of progress, particularly in terms of the generation of social and economic returns of the initiatives, the action plan would facilitate and attract public and private sector investment.**

## Annex

### **Institutional framework**

1. The Issue Management Group (IMG) of the United Nations Environmental Management Group (EMG) on Land was established to propose options for a coherent United Nations system-wide contribution to land degradation challenges, including the implementation of the UNCCD 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy).
2. Within this framework, 18 entities of the United Nations system, constituting the EMG, and 5 non-governmental organizations contributed to the preparation of the Global Drylands Report: a United Nations system-wide response (GDR) in order to set out a common vision, an agenda for United Nations and international action on dryland management and the role of the United Nations system in addressing this issue along with the interconnected topics of climate change and food security, through a positive development and investment approach.
3. The GDR reviewed extensively the challenges posed by desertification / land degradation and drought and, using The Strategy as its starting point, reaffirmed the need to support the implementation of the Convention with sound science and predictable investments.
4. The Conference of the Parties (COP) at its tenth session took note of the GDR recommendations and, by its decision 9/COP.10, called upon the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the EMG, to work on a concrete action plan for 2012–2018 to promote and strengthen relationships between international organizations, institutions and agencies for the implementation of the recommendations of the GDR.
5. The action plan developed by the United Nations system agencies, under the coordination of the EMG and UNCCD secretariats focuses on:
  - (a) Concrete actions to promote and strengthen collaboration for the sustainable development of drylands, between international organizations, institutions, agencies and stakeholders;
  - (b) Management and control of drylands degradation;
  - (c) Strengthening strategic partnerships, either by building on established mechanisms or by developing new cooperation initiatives.
6. The Senior Officials meeting of the United Nations EMG held in November 2012 decided to continue the work of the IMG on land for another year to prepare an action plan on the implementation of the EMG report, “Global Drylands, a UN system-wide Contribution”, for consideration by the COP of the UNCCD at its eleventh session (COP 11).
7. Document UNEP/GCSS.XII/10 of the 12th Special Session of the United Nations Environment Programme Governing Council contains the GDR recommendations and refers to decision 9/COP.8 by the COP of the UNCCD in which the preparation of a specific action plan for 2012–2018 on the follow-up of implementation and its submission to COP 11 in 2013 is requested.