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REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION, PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 22,
PARAGRAPH 2(A) AND (B), AND ARTICLE 26 OF THE CONVENTION

REVIEW OF REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION BY AFFECTED LATIN AMERICAN
AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRY PARTIES, INCLUDING ON THE PARTICIPATORY
PROCESS, AND ON EXPERIENCE GAINED AND RESULTS ACHIEVED IN
THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PROGRAMMES

SYNTHESIS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REPORTS
SUBMITTED BY AFFECTED LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRY PARTIES, AND
PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBREGIONAL AND
REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Note by the secretariat

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Part One

SYNTHESIS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL
REPORTS FROM AFFECTED LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRY PARTIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with article 26, paragraph 1, of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), "each Party shall communicate to the Conference of the Parties for consideration at its ordinary sessions, through the Permanent Secretariat, reports on the measures which it has taken for the implementation of the Convention".

2. The format and content of the national reports are specified in decision 11/COP.1, paragraph 10(a). In collaboration with several United Nations agencies, the UNCCD secretariat prepared a Help Guide (ICCD/COP(3)/INF.3) designed to provide a common format, practical recommendations and support for the preparation of national reports.

3. The first national reports of the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) country Parties were prepared at the beginning of 2000 for review at the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP).

4. The first synthesis (ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.2(D)) was based on national reports received from 30 country Parties of LAC, exactly the number of countries that had ratified the Convention at that time. The reports highlighted important progress in, as well as significant constraints on, the implementation of the Convention in the region.

5. The first reporting process stressed that the most important set of problems affecting countries of the region were based on anthropogenic activities, namely: deforestation, water pollution and inappropriate agricultural practices. Human activities generate negative environmental, social, economic and financial impacts. Poverty eradication, as a cause or effect of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, is considered to be the priority in combating desertification.

6. To tackle these problems, countries have been formulating and adopting laws and policies to facilitate implementation of programmes and to develop projects dealing with several environmental issues. The process of institution building, especially in the last four years, has been helping countries to incorporate the implementation of the Convention into their environmental framework. Statistics show that 53 per cent of countries had ratified the Convention in 1997. At the beginning of 2001, this number had increased to 91 per cent and to-date all the LAC countries have signed and/or ratified the Convention.

7. From an institutional point of view, important advances were noted in the implementation of the Convention. At the time of the first reporting exercise, almost all the country Parties had their national coordinating bodies (NCBs) in place, but some of them were not operational. The focal points had been appointed, and all country Parties had been adopting

political and legal measures to consolidate the process of implementing the Convention.

8. However, the political and institutional measures and the above-mentioned progress were not enough to combat desertification and drought; the need to include desertification and drought in governments' national agendas was stressed.

9. The users of natural resources did not have access to basic knowledge and/or appropriate technologies to manage natural resources better, owing to the lack of efficient mechanisms for disseminating knowledge and information technologies to countries.

10. The participatory process for the preparation of national action programmes (NAPs) can be positively evaluated. All country Parties, particularly those at an advanced stage in the formulation of their NAPs, report on measures that include the participation of civil society, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women's associations in the consultative process for NAP formulation and in the formulation and implementation of projects at local level.

II. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL REPORTS AND EMERGING TRENDS

11. The second reporting exercise of the LAC countries reveals differences compared with the first reports. At the beginning of 2000, countries were compiling information on all activities implemented to combat desertification, including activities carried out before the signing of the Convention. It was a four-year compilation exercise. The main objective of the second national report was to update information from 2000 and 2001. However, the majority of reports record the history of implementation of the Convention in their countries, combining information on the period before the first reporting exercise with information that should be taken into account in the second reporting exercise. In many cases, it is not clear to which period the information relates.

12. In 2002, with all 33 LAC countries having signed and/or ratified the Convention and all eligible countries having received financial support for the preparation of their reports, 28 reports were submitted within the required deadline.

13. Most of the reports stress macro-economic and policy difficulties in the majority of countries, which determine the priorities set at national level. The current economic and fiscal crisis which some LAC countries are undergoing, limits their financial capacity to implement environment policies and measures. Some reports state that in spite of far-reaching economic adjustments and reforms, the issues were still included as national priorities for development. Nevertheless, the agendas of those countries remain largely "economic", and there is not sufficient awareness of the linkages between the promotion of policies and measures to combat desertification and drought, and economic development.

14. Some reports make the point that the above-mentioned factors (fiscal crisis and the economic impact on policies) apply more to regions prone to drought and desertification than anywhere else. In dry regions, economic, environmental and social vulnerability is particularly high and appropriate measures cannot be taken owing to lack of financial resources. This situation is getting worse in a context of accelerating climate change and economic hardship. This is further threatening the livelihoods of local populations.

15. Political changes are also mentioned in a number of reports as constraints on the implementation of the Convention and the efficacy of the focal points. The high turnover of national focal points is a further constraint on UNCCD implementation.

16. Most of the reports mention the financial aspect explicitly as the crucial constraint on implementation of the Convention. They highlight the lack of effective mechanisms for funding policies to combat desertification and drought in the region. NCBs lack adequate funding and do not have a strong standing in the adoption and implementation of decisions relating to the Convention. Reports mention that the Convention and national policies to combat desertification, land degradation and drought could attract more attention if more funds were allocated through international cooperation.

17. Priority issues of countries can be divided into two groups. On the one hand, incorporation of UNCCD objectives into national and sectoral policies is still considered to be important. Substantial efforts have been made in this direction, for example some Caribbean countries have taken steps to identify and set in place a common framework for issues relating to drought, coastal erosion and soil degradation within their environmental agendas. They are also making efforts to incorporate the principles of the Convention into their legal and institutional frameworks and to create a policy environment conducive to the generation of synergies.

18. On the other hand, in other countries desertification has a major social and economic impact. For the countries that have already formulated their NAPs, the Convention is currently in a new stage of implementation. Local actions such as the restoration of degraded lands, promotion of water management at watershed or micro-basin level, collection and application of traditional knowledge and technologies, and financing small projects for land users are the main priorities.

19. From an economic point of view, a new issue has emerged in some reports relating to the attribution of value to services performed by natural resources. The terrestrial bio-productive system and other natural resources perform an environmental service that should be included in a payment system and/or mechanism. This payment system and/or mechanism would contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and the control of land degradation.

20. All reports mention the relevance of the participatory process to the effective implementation of the Convention. The involvement of civil society organizations in this process has resulted in cooperation among them that can be expanded and strengthened.

21. Another aspect calling for attention is the direct participation of local populations in the process of formulating and implementing environmental and development policies. Special mention should be given to the Aymara Parliament where indigenous peoples are discussing, among others matters, how to combat desertification.

22. Indicators to assess and monitor desertification and drought processes are generally given little coverage in the reports. The majority of countries do not have adequate resources for this task.

23. Traditional knowledge is mentioned in some reports. Efforts have been and are being made to compile indigenous technologies and knowledge, however nothing is said about assessing their applicability in the context of a modern economy. "Zero tillage traditional technology" and "biomass growth" are mentioned as alternatives to profit-driven agriculture by some countries.

24. Gender issues were considered in only a few reports. This can be explained by the fact that gender issues were covered in the first reporting exercise.

III. SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS

25. LAC countries perceive the implementation of the Convention as part of the solution to their environment-related problems. The majority of LAC country Parties mention in their reports that they do not have predictable financial resources, adequate human resources, an institutional and legal framework and the necessary technological capacity.

26. Eighteen per cent of reports mention that the LAC region is facing severe economic constraints, financial crisis and structural adjustments. As a result, the financing of national policies, in particular those relating to the environment, is in crisis. This trend is expected to continue and spread to other countries.

27. LAC countries are affected by land degradation, desertification, coastal erosion, drought and natural disasters on a significant scale; they also have a backlog of environmental and social problems and overcoming them will require enormous financial, institutional and technical efforts. This situation shows that the LAC countries are neither a "green region" nor a "nature paradise", as is often claimed.

A. Participatory processes involving civil society, non-governmental and community-based organizations

28. Several approaches to the participatory process are mentioned in the reports. All of them stress its importance for the success of the implementation of the Convention. This fact shows the willingness of

countries to encourage participation by different civil society actors, such as NGOs, community-based organizations, the scientific community, the private sector and various associations, in the implementation of the Convention.

29. All countries are seeking opportunities to stimulate the participation of all major stakeholders in achieving sustainable results. Campaigns have been organized and "World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought" (17 June) celebrated in different countries to increase public awareness. Some countries of the Organization of East Caribbean States (OECS) used awareness campaigns to define their NAP priorities.

30. Similarly, the preparation of the reports was an opportunity to mobilize institutions and civil society in the region. Ninety-four per cent of country Parties organized meetings at national level to validate their reports.

31. Civil society actors have made an important contribution to launching NAPs in some countries where no action had been initiated to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. Awareness campaigns in various sectors of civil society have contributed to identifying problems and priorities. In some cases, the process has advanced and, as a result, NAPs are drafted and waiting to be approved.

32. Another aspect of the participatory process was that NGOs and community-based organizations defined priority investments in affected areas. Fourteen per cent of reports mention that various stakeholders have contributed directly to the design of projects and to the identification of financial resources. These organizations are already able to access financial resources for project implementation. One country has a financial mechanism exclusively for NGOs and community-based organizations.

33. The participation of indigenous communities in combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought was stressed in 11 per cent of reports. In particular, the Aymara Parliament, created within the context of the Puna Americana subregional action programme, has been involved in a number of issues relating to the implementation of the Convention and poverty eradication.

34. The participatory process at the community level is also playing a role in data collection and the monitoring of natural resource management. One country reports the participation of local communities in the selection and use of indicators for the preparation of environmental diagnosis. A capacity-building process for local communities is taking place in view of the impact of their activities on land degradation, water resources, forestry management, etc.

35. Thirty per cent of reports mention the important contribution the International NGO Network on Desertification and Drought (RIOD) makes towards implementation of the Convention.

36. The gender issue is mentioned in 26 per cent of reports. Some countries make general comments; only one country has taken specific measures to facilitate and improve women's participation in the implementation of the Convention and environmental policies.

37. Finally, one of the reports mentions a conceptual problem relating to the format of the participatory process and to the linkage with synergy and efficiency concepts. This process can be enhanced through more effective coordination of community involvement.

38. Forty-five per cent of the reports submitted stress that the progress made in the participatory process has made an effective contribution to the various aspects mentioned above.

B. Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements

39. Forty-eight per cent of reporting country Parties mention that progress has been made on legislative and institutional frameworks, in three main directions: (i) formulation of legislation in areas relating to desertification, such as forest and water resources, (ii) legal reforms aimed at facilitating coherent policies and regulations to combat desertification and drought, and (iii) laws and regulations on the use of natural resources, and their enforcement.

40. Fifteen per cent of reports mention new laws on forests and land degradation. These legal instruments have been adopted or are in the process of being adopted by the respective parliaments. Another 12 per cent of reports mention the progress achieved in ensuring proper enforcement of existing laws and regulations, such as zoning, taxes and other obligations relating to forestry management.

41. The St. George's Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the OECS has had an important political and institutional impact in the East Caribbean countries by promoting legal and institutional reforms to harmonize and strengthen the environmental sector and identifying land degradation, drought and coastal erosion as key issues. In the same way, the Tegucigalpa Protocol of the Central American Commission for Development and Environment (CCAD) was signed by Central American countries to promote a common approach to tackling environmental issues, including desertification and drought through a desertification and drought committee composed of national focal points.

42. Six countries in the region have had their NAPs adopted and 13 are in the process of formulating and/or adopting them. That represents an improvement of 190 per cent in the number of countries having initiated the NAP process.

43. It is clear that the bottom-up approach has been used to implement the Convention. However, more than 40 per cent of reports mention the need to create political bodies and devise plans to combat desertification at municipal, provincial and/or country level. Reports stress the need to facilitate the development of new institutional measures to concretize

projects already formulated. Many countries are seeking to attain results without even having clearly defined their institutional arrangements, such as adoption of their NAPs. This approach has impacts at the national level because the need for predictable funding for the implementation of the Convention has not been fully addressed.

44. Some innovative approaches are being adopted in places where drought and coastal erosion represent serious threats, owing to specific climatic, environmental and geo-morphological characteristics. Under NAP formulation synergies are being sought with other bodies that use the ecosystem approach, particularly biodiversity conservation.

45. Although the status of NCBs in the region has improved, their financial autonomy is still at the same low level as in the first reporting period.

C. Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusions of partnership agreements

46. Obtaining funding is a great challenge to the countries of the region. Most of the reports mention that, even though there have been improvements in the availability of certain financial resources, financial assistance is still inadequate and unpredictable at all levels of implementation of the Convention.

47. Some of the countries which were preparing their NAPs last year, asked the UNCCD secretariat for financial support to finalize this process before preparation of the second report. Owing to limited financial resources, the UNCCD secretariat was unable to support all the countries. Some reports stress the urgent need to design a financial strategy to facilitate the flow of financial resources in support of NAP implementation.

48. Seventy-nine per cent of reports mention problems relating to the macro-economic crisis in the region and financial and budget constraints, making the point that without additional financial resources, implementation of the Convention and hence of their NAPs will not be sustainable. The number of countries that have made modest investments of national resources to combat desertification has increased (totalling US\$ 11.5 million in 2001/2002 and benefiting more than 26,000 families).

49. Bilateral international cooperation has made it possible to mobilize a small amount of financial resources for some countries. Three reports mention that more significant resources for desertification and land degradation are needed for research and projects.

50. Conceptually the reports stress the need to investigate further the link between natural resources and economic issues, particularly trade, bearing in mind that the terrestrial bio-system performs an economic, social and environmental service and that a mechanism should be devised to attribute value to it.

D. Linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies

51. Synergy at the national level was considered one of the most important issues in national reports. Seventy per cent of them mention the need to identify synergies at national level and among international conventions and other policies. However, effective action to build synergies is still in the initial stages in most of the countries.

52. Attention should also be drawn to the initiatives mentioned by some reports for incorporating desertification matters into other policies, such as land conservation, sustainable use of water resources and forestry, capacity building, transfer of technology and information systems. Two Parties report on successful integration of desertification, combating land degradation and mitigating the effects of drought into water resource policies.

53. Twenty-seven per cent of reports mention specific measures to set up a closer working relationship between the sister conventions that emerged from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, for example, meetings of focal points and an intensified exchange of information. One of the operational linkages is the application of experience and knowledge acquired in the formulation of biodiversity strategies. However, in this case, it is difficult to provide an assessment of this exercise, owing to the uncertainty of the results. One report proposes that the approach to addressing desertification should be closely linked to implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Such an approach could be part of a strategy to promote a closer relationship between the UNCCD NAPs and the CBD. Similarly, links could be established with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

54. The UNCCD secretariat provided four countries of the region with financial and technical support to stimulate synergies among the Rio conventions through national meetings. The meetings have demonstrated that synergy in policies cannot be achieved spontaneously, but is the result of targeted efforts. One country has drawn up a synergy plan.

E. Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought

55. Thirty per cent of countries comment in detail on the rehabilitation of degraded lands in their national reports. Some important initiatives have been developed, for example relating to soil desalinization and reforestation, and demonstration projects on soil management and measures to certify productive activities have been carried out. Two country Parties have formulated projects to prevent salinization of the soil and to restore saline soils, in the context of their NAPs.

56. Reforestation measures are mentioned in only a few reports. One Party reports that a reforestation programme has restored about 600,000 hectares of land. Other countries mention that they are implementing forestation

programmes covering approximately 20,000 hectares. One country mentions the implementation of soil management demonstration projects on 17,000 hectares, which helped restore productivity and prevent migration.

57. Some countries mention the use of traditional knowledge in the rehabilitation of lands. Thanks to use of the "zero tillage" and "biomass growth" traditional technologies, hundreds of farmers and local communities are benefiting from improved land conservation and productivity. These are considered to be best practices, which could be replicated elsewhere, as appropriate.

58. Other important activities have been developed, for example, formulating strategies for water resource management, issuance of certificates for export products and other projects aimed at stimulating sustainable agricultural practices.

59. Early warning systems are mentioned in seventy per cent of reports. Given the importance in many countries of drought-related problems, these countries are making efforts to develop benchmarks and indicators for drought prevention and for monitoring the effects of drought.

60. Three country Parties report that they already have early warning systems in operation; another four have selected drought indicators but the lack of financial resources is the main constraint on getting drought forecasting operational.

F. Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment

61. Generally speaking, assessment of desertification in the LAC region is progressing steadily. At the time of submission of the first national reports, seven countries had finished their diagnoses of desertification. At present, nine countries have completed them; three more have made significant progress in their preparation.

62. Indicators to assess and monitor desertification and drought are considered important for understanding the real extent of the problem at national level. Some countries have made efforts to prepare their national diagnosis to show how big and important the problem is and how it is affecting productivity and populations. The absence of an indicator methodology is a serious constraint, but at least four research teams are working on this issue in the region.

63. Three country Parties have been working, through an ongoing subregional project, to develop a system of indicators to identify and study desertification processes. The project is being implemented by governmental and non-governmental organizations.

64. Mention should be made of the experience of one country in formulating participatory approaches to desertification assessment. Through the project "Participative Assessment of Environmental Quality", stakeholders are being trained at local level to identify environmental changes, including land degradation.

65. Two reports mention the need to develop more research to detect the trends and impacts of climate change at national level, using drought indicators. By contrast, some countries - especially in Central America and the Caribbean - have been monitoring the effects of drought on their economies and population. For them, the problem of drought has high priority.

G. Access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how

66. Appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how are mentioned only superficially in the second reporting exercise. Appropriate technology and knowledge can be obtained from two sources: (i) available traditional knowledge and, (ii) foreign technology available through international technical cooperation.

67. Two reports mention the "zero tillage" and "bio-mass increase" traditional technologies, which have been widely used in the past, as sound practices for land conservation and to prevent losses due to natural disasters. It is important to notice that the "zero tillage" technology has been used as a viable alternative to modern profit-driven agriculture.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED

A. Lessons from the national action programme formulation and implementation process

68. Both the first and second reporting exercises show that country Parties are at different stages of implementation of the Convention, and actions developed during this period reflect these different stages. Six countries have adopted their NAPs, but because of lack of financial resources cannot implement them; 13 countries are working on the formulation of their NAPs or have already drafted them; only some of them have been supported by the UNCCD secretariat. Other countries are still carrying out research to establish the real extent of land degradation and drought at the national level. Technical and financial support is necessary to strengthen these activities so that the UNCCD can be fully implemented in those countries.

69. Some country Parties reaffirm their intention to carry out legal and institutional reforms with a view to achieving normative coherence among the different legal instruments. A group of countries with more experience of combating desertification is seeking ways to decentralize implementation of the Convention. These countries are formulating policies at a local level; creating provincial and or municipal councils; and creating funding mechanisms for projects at a local level or implementing projects with local resources. The formulation of NAPs and their incorporation into national development strategies should be carried out in association with concrete actions for the benefit of land-users.

70. As climate change makes its impact felt, the vulnerability of lower income groups to drought and desertification can only increase. Drought, coastal erosion, climate change and biodiversity losses are of overwhelming importance in some countries. For this reason, adapting NAPs to take account of such issues was emphasized in the second reporting exercise as a viable strategy for developing fully the Convention's potential.

71. All aspects relating to NAP formulation and implementation reflect the broad macro-economic and political context of the region. Persistent economic and financial crises and the structural adjustments that countries are facing represent the most important factor in the vulnerability of policies.

72. Predictable financial resources are crucial to the implementation of the Convention. The absence of mechanisms specifically designed to finance the formulation and implementation of NAPs is a constraint on implementation of the Convention on a sustainable basis. Countries have not attached a sufficiently high priority to desertification during multilateral and bilateral negotiations and consequently international cooperation partners have not developed an efficient mechanism to finance implementation of the Convention.

73. Some countries mention innovative initiatives to finance implementation of the Convention, relating to the environmental services that natural resources provide and to the need to develop a payment system for that. This system could also be applied in combating desertification.

74. Poverty eradication is of great relevance in areas of the region affected by desertification and drought, and some reports indicate innovative ways of attaining this goal. Funds to support small projects and/or productive activities are helping to increase family incomes. Growth in agricultural production through land rehabilitation and conservation is also a way to eradicate poverty and prevent migration. Economically sustainable activities that create jobs and generate incomes should be given special attention by countries and international cooperation partners. Countries and the international community should also address ecological and social vulnerability through the options offered by the Convention.

75. There is a trend towards addressing the institutional and legal aspects of implementation of the Convention separately. The bottom-up approach can be reinforced by setting up participatory bodies at local level, implementing projects and adopting concrete measures that benefit land users.

76. Participatory processes still play an important and positive role in all stages of implementation of the Convention, at national, subregional and regional levels. In the majority of countries, the NGOs, community-based organizations and users of natural resources make a substantial contribution to the preparation and implementation of NAPs, and obtaining recognition for them. This fact has been acknowledged by governments on various occasions, and the reports mention this. Notwithstanding these improvements, civil society's commitment to the Convention needs to be increased.

77. Awareness campaigns and workshops in support of preparation of national reports have created new opportunities, first for stakeholders to take part in building the institutional frameworks necessary for the action programmes and second to satisfy local demands in terms of project implementation.

78. A few countries are working on benchmarks, indicators and traditional knowledge issues. Research institutions are working in these fields in at least four countries, and the results will be useful world-wide. However, additional efforts are still required. It is important to bear in mind the role of international cooperation in finalizing this process.

79. Rehabilitation of degraded lands is crucial to the implementation of the Convention, and for the first time national reports are providing quantitative data on this. For instance, three country Parties report that an area of land covering 647,000 hectares in total has been rehabilitated. This modest figure is nevertheless an important indicator showing that concrete measures are being taken to address land degradation.

80. Traditional knowledge is seldom mentioned in the reports. The "zero tillage" and "bio-mass increase" technologies have been used in many countries, but are only mentioned in two reports. These technologies are one option for adapting sustainable agriculture to market conditions.

B. Lessons from the reporting system

81. Twenty-eight reports were received from the 33 country Parties of the region. There may be several reasons for this limited response, including a lack of genuine commitment at international level to assist affected developing countries in identifying problems. This in itself is an indication that more concerted efforts are needed on the part of all the actors to move forward from the stage of problem identification to finding solutions. There are also a number of internal political problems which directly affect the reporting process and delay timely submission of some reports.

82. The quality of the reports reflects the limited financial support available for the reporting exercise. More accurate data are needed to provide a clear picture of what is happening at the country level; to this end, the use of benchmarks and indicators in national diagnosis of desertification and drought problems is recommended. The format suggested in the Help Guide applies to the earlier stages of the Convention, and for this reason it should be reviewed and updated.

83. The majority of national reports show that the progress made towards implementing the Convention could be reflected better if the collection and recording of information were improved. What is more, the information collected does not reflect, in many cases, the initiatives carried out to combat desertification and drought at national level.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

84. The country Parties in LAC are at different stages of implementation of the Convention. Some countries have already formulated their NAPs and are at the implementation stage. For them, financial support is necessary to lend credibility to the proposed programmes and to execute projects. Other countries require financial and technical support to complete the process of formulating their NAPs. A few countries are at the initial stages and need financial and technical support to mobilize the relevant institutions and actors for implementation of the Convention. The UNCCD secretariat is often requested to provide technical and financial support to countries in all the above-mentioned stages and has been assisting them in accordance with its limited possibilities.

85. Indicators on desertification and drought are of great importance in the region, and both country Parties and the international community should pay more attention to them. Few countries yet have a drought early warning system in operation. Some countries have produced drought indicators, but they need funding to implement them; the majority still has to develop them. Notwithstanding some significant progress, indicators on desertification cannot be considered to be in the final stages of development. This reflects the inherent difficulties of the subject. It is not a simple task to select and use indicators on desertification, since a specialized infrastructure and human resources are required. The majority of countries do not have adequate resources at their disposal.

86. Projects relating to benchmarks and indicators have already been formulated under some NAPs. Once these projects are implemented, their results could be replicated in other countries or subregions. The existence of several research teams working in the region on benchmarks and indicators is an advantage that should be better exploited. The international community should include these issues in a cooperation agenda.

87. Awareness campaigns are an effective means of generating momentum in the implementation of the Convention. As mentioned above, countries have used awareness campaigns to mobilize various stakeholders, and to demonstrate to them the importance of controlling land degradation and desertification. Moreover, it has proved possible to design general outlines for tackling these problems and, in some cases, to draft NAPs. NGOs and other organizations have participated effectively in the process. Efforts have to be made to facilitate and improve the quality of their participation by civil society in the implementation of the Convention and to coordinate the activities of the various bodies involved. It is recommended that the UNCCD secretariat continue supporting national awareness campaigns, thus facilitating the participation of civil society.

88. Reports highlight the importance of implementing the UNCCD through synergy among the sister conventions. One reason is the lack of available financial resources, and another the linkages among issues. However, concrete activities to achieve synergy among the sister conventions and environmental policies are not simple. National synergy plans must be formulated and implemented, since they can be instruments to integrate these

conventions into environmental policies. This process is an ongoing effort on which the UNCCD secretariat should continue to focus.

89. Reports recognize the low institutional and operational profile of focal points and the need to improve their technical and institutional capacities. The capacity of focal points to formulate projects and conduct negotiations with national and international organizations should be strengthened. The UNCCD secretariat should play a more active role in this process and should provide the necessary resources to improve the capabilities of focal points.

90. The Latin American and Caribbean region has a very valuable stock of traditional knowledge. Corresponding studies have been carried out at national and regional levels, some of them supported by the UNCCD secretariat. Reports mention many different technologies that could be applied in a sustainable way, in the region and world-wide. However, there is still a need for more comprehensive studies into their adaptation for use in modern productive models in competitive market conditions, with the exception of the 'zero tillage' and biomass growth technologies.

91. The progress made in the implementation of the Convention in the region can be seen in the various activities implemented and the results achieved. This means that the cost-effectiveness of financial resources applied was high, since the level of external financing to the region was not significant. The majority of countries expressed their intention to move forward in the implementation of the Convention by finalizing NAPs, implementing projects at local level and preparing other related activities, such as workshops on water resources and forestry. Country Parties are seeking to establish partnerships with developed country Parties for the provision of predictable financial support. Several countries have approached the UNCCD secretariat on a number of occasions for catalytic support, but it has not been possible to assist them in all cases due to the financial constraints.

92. As to the reporting process, it is recommended that efforts be made to create databases, at national level, on the implementation of the Convention. This initiative should be linked to the current efforts to set up a desertification information network for the LAC region (DESELAC).

Part Two

PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

I. INTRODUCTION

93. According to decision 11/COP.1, country Parties may provide information on subregional and regional activities. The secretariat of the UNCCD has prepared the present report on regional and subregional activities using documents and information available, in particular the reports of the seven regional meetings, the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and the last four meetings of the Forum of the LAC Ministers of the Environment.

II. BACKGROUND

94. The Latin American and Caribbean region (LAC) accounts for 15 per cent of the world's land area, or around 20 million km², 7.7 per cent of its total population, or 502 million people, and it generates 5.7 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP). (World Bank, 1997).

95. Far-reaching social and economic changes have led to many conflicting trends and taken a heavy toll on the region's natural resources. In most countries, structural reforms, economic growth, economic liberalization and privatization have left unresolved, if not worsened, the scourge of poverty. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (Social panorama of Latin America 2000/2001, September 2001), there were more than 211 million poor in 1999.

96. Addressing poverty is essential to combating desertification in the region. It requires harmonization of a wide range of policies aimed at assuring economic effectiveness, social equity and ecological integrity. The strengthening of endogenous capacities is a major challenge, particularly regarding analysis and implementation of policies and strategies.

97. Today, more than 320 million hectares of land in the region are affected by desertification processes, mainly due to human actions: poor agricultural practices and over-exploitation, overgrazing, deforestation, expansion of the agricultural frontier causing, *inter alia*, soil erosion, chemical degradation, compaction, sodification, salinization and biodiversity loss. The deterioration in water quality and availability has not only affected productivity, but also resulted in human losses caused by the spread of water-related diseases, like the outbreak of cholera at the beginning of 1990s and the recent dengue epidemic. Moreover, the extremely high rate of urbanization (74 per cent of the population, with an annual growth of 2.3 per cent) and the lack of appropriate land management on a national scale have intensified competition and conflict among land and water users.

98. The efforts made in recent decades towards the sustainable use of natural resources have yielded few results. The pressure on land and water resources has been intensified, resulting in serious resource degradation, loss of productivity (in the face of growing demands for food, construction materials and fuel), migration to urban areas or to even more marginal and fragile soils, disintegration of social structures, economic and political instability, and perpetuation and aggravation of rural and urban poverty.

99. The participatory approach has been successful in the UNCCD implementation process at the regional and subregional level: civil society, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), indigenous groups, together with representatives of state and local institutions, have participated in activities designed to raise awareness and provide an opportunity to discuss possible future initiatives, taking into account the multi-dimensional character of the problems. The International Network of Non-Governmental Organizations to Combat Desertification (RIOD-LAC) is fully recognized as a vital element in the process.

100. The role of the Desertification Information Network for the Latin American and Caribbean Region (DESELAC), created by the LAC countries and included in the regional action programme (RAP), is paramount to strengthening the participation of all stakeholders and facilitating the exchange of experience and information among them.

101. Funding remains the most significant problem. The scarce resources mobilized so far are not sufficient to cover the priority activities identified in the RAP and the subregional action programmes (SRAPs). However, the RAP and SRAPs are slowly but steadily being implemented, starting with configuration of the institutional frameworks and formulation of concrete work plans to enhance horizontal cooperation among developing countries. In particular, during the sixth and seventh regional meetings and at a number of subregional meetings, the Parties committed themselves to elaborate strategies in order to secure greater involvement of donor partners in activities at regional and subregional level.

III. SYNTHESIS OF TRENDS CONCERNING SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

102. There are six SRAPs: Gran Chaco Americano, Puna Americana, Mesoamerica, the Hispaniola, the islands of the Eastern Caribbean on biodiversity and land degradation, and the Chile/Argentina bilateral programme on gender perspectives. The two latter have not been implemented for lack of funding.

103. The RAP contains nine priority projects. They play a catalytic role in NAP formulation and implementation, but have made only limited progress because of little access to predictable financial resources.

104. Moreover, regional dynamics have made it possible to develop new initiatives within the subregional, regional and interregional frameworks. Five further initiatives are in preparation or implementation: synergy in Central American countries; integration of priority activities to combat desertification into the framework established by agreements between the

African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) and the European Union (EU); development of benchmarks and indicators on drought and land degradation in the Caribbean; integrated watershed management in LAC countries; and implementation of the interregional platform of cooperation between Africa and LAC.

IV. PROGRESS OF SUBREGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

A. Subregional action programme for the sustainable development of the Gran Chaco Americano

105. The area of the Gran Chaco Americano comprises around 1 million km², of which 53 per cent is in Argentina (10 provinces), 24 per cent in Paraguay (three provinces) and 13 per cent in Bolivia (three provinces). It represents one of the largest dryland ecosystems of the region (six per cent of South America), with important biodiversity. Various studies that used biophysical and socioeconomic indicators have identified severe levels of desertification in the region, revealing the gravity of the situation and the urgent need for measures to stop and reverse the process.

106. The Gran Chaco SRAP has attracted new interest, at both national and international level, since its launching forum (Argentina, May 2000). The meeting drew up a concrete action plan for the subregion, prioritized objectives and refined previous initiatives. While awaiting the availability of adequate funds, Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay have, in the meantime, strengthened the programme institutionally with the creation of a provisional tri-national consulting committee, the promotion of data transfer, research, training and education, cooperation with the academic sector, the rural production sector, NGOs, local communities and indigenous groups. The UNCCD secretariat provided support for the organization of a NGOs' meeting on desertification and rural poverty (Argentina, June 2001) at which NGO involvement in the implementation of the Gran Chaco SRAP was discussed.

107. At the local level, a number of micro-projects have been implemented, self-managed by indigenous and farming communities. Women represent a high percentage of the participants in the activities. Left behind by seasonal migration movements that concern mainly men, women and their families very often remain alone to work the land and manage natural resources. They become the most vulnerable group to desertification and, thus, the most fragile constituency among the poor.

108. At the political level, one of the most important achievements has been the Declaration on Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Gran Chaco Americano (Argentina, September 2001). The Declaration constitutes a valuable political effort to give more visibility to initiatives undertaken in the subregion and a concrete platform for the further institutionalization of the process.

109. At the institutional level, monitoring units have been set up in the countries, *inter alia* to generate the conditions necessary for integrating the issues relating to Gran Chaco ecosystem into the programmes that are already receiving international support. These units will also guarantee the

continuity of administrative and technical activities and act as a permanent point of reference for actors at national and local levels, and for other institutional partners and international organizations; they will promote the constant flow and dissemination of information and integrate their activities with national institutional networks, including universities, research institutes, RIOD, indigenous associations and farmers' associations. The same activities had been carried out under the programme for the exchange and systematization of experience among Gran Chaco organizations. Additionally, a citizens' control committee allows communities to play a full part in monitoring and assessing the work being carried out.

B. Subregional action programme for the sustainable development of the Puna Americana

110. As in the Gran Chaco, the bio-climatic conditions prevailing throughout most of the Puna Americana determine the very fragile ecosystems and the very difficult socioeconomic conditions of the local populations. This area comprises around 700,000 km², consisting mainly of shallow and often salt-affected or stony and rocky soils in the medium and higher elevations, with uneven distribution of surface water resources, rare or erratic rainfall, and daily fluctuations in temperature due to low humidity and high solar radiation. Poverty affects most of the people living in the Andean area: out of 12 million inhabitants, 60 per cent are poor (80 per cent if only rural areas are considered). Excessive fragmentation of land tenure, high unemployment rates, high infant malnutrition and mortality indices, a deficit of basic services, significant migration (50 per cent of men have already left the region), lack of communication and trade facilities and very limited access to lending are among the factors that determine an economy of mere subsistence. This type of economy is often associated with overgrazing and destruction of biodiversity. Moreover, the intense mining activity associated with foreign investment has radically transformed traditional agro-pastoral habits in certain areas and severely affected the environment in terms of reduced water availability and pollution.

111. The ratification of the Convention by Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru, together with the experience acquired in the Gran Chaco SRAP, paved the way for the formulation of the Puna Americana SRAP, to which was recently added the area of Paramo, at the request of Ecuador.

112. The meeting for the coordination of the Puna Americana SRAP (Bolivia, May 2001) was an important step forward in the process. The meeting clarified the principles and concepts of the programme, revised priorities and strategies, proposed an institutional framework and, most importantly, drew up a concrete agenda of activities.

113. The participation of indigenous populations and community-based organizations was recognized as the fundamental principle on which projects and other activities should be based. As the original inhabitants of the region, they possess a heritage of knowledge and traditional practices which is of undeniable value for the sustainable management of natural resources.

114. The concrete involvement of the Aymara Parliament is of particular relevance to the participatory process. It is a completely new element in strategies to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in the Puna Americana. The Parliament was created in June 1996 to protect the hydrological resources of the Andean watersheds and the ecology and environment of areas seriously threatened by new production and consumption patterns, and to safeguard the ancestral culture, identity and knowledge of indigenous peoples. It brings together the millions of people who are descended from the Qullana and who are currently dispersed in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru. This itinerant parliament puts particular emphasis on land degradation and desertification processes. Its principal concerns are: environmental impact assessment studies, especially on indiscriminate water withdrawal from Lake Titicaca; awareness raising and environmental education programmes for stakeholders; promotion of bio-horticultural practices; and construction and maintenance of terraces for food production on steep slopes.

115. A declaration on the sustainable development of the Puna Americana, which makes specific reference to the Convention, was also agreed and signed (Bolivia, January 2002). In this declaration, the Aymara Parliament proposes to: organize open and participatory meetings to sensitize the public and authorities to the principles and objectives of the Convention; establish technical bodies for scientific and operational studies aimed at helping in the formulation of integrated programmes and projects; implement joint actions producing equal benefits for all and protecting natural resources from injudicious use; set up effective information systems; promote synergy among the sustainable development conventions; request the help of the international community and cooperation agencies.

116. One relevant initiative is the association of Aymara municipalities (Mancomunidad de Municipios Aymaras sin Fronteras) that brings together the mayors of subregions from across Bolivia, Chile and Peru. With the support of the World Bank, it has been working since 2001 on a tri-national project for the sustainable development of the municipalities of the Puna Americana, including combating desertification. The first priority of the project is the exchange of systematized and standardized information, through a permanent communication network, and dissemination through mass media and audio-visual products.

117. The institutional framework of the Puna Americana SRAP has been strengthened by the creation of a secretariat that will help coordinate the implementation of planned activities, mainly by managing available funds and facilitating the information flow. A technical and operational executive committee has been set up, composed of national focal points (NFPs) and representatives of indigenous communities belonging to the Quechua and Aymara peoples. Both the secretariat and the executive committee will be closely linked to government, academic and research institutions, civil organizations and production sectors.

C. Subregional action programme in Mesoamerica

118. At the Fifth Regional Meeting of LAC countries (Peru, August 1999), country Parties requested the UNCCD secretariat to promote a technical and scientific diagnosis of the status of desertification and its socioeconomic and environmental impacts in Central America, to facilitate the establishment of an integrated early warning and monitoring system in the subregion and assess options for the integration and participation of the various sectors in combating desertification. The study was presented at the Sixth Regional Meeting of LAC countries (El Salvador, October 2000).

119. The general objective of the diagnosis was to identify and characterize current and potential areas at risk of desertification in Central America by formulating and applying a clear methodology based on the integration of existing classification systems. The assessment was based on a set of indicators which took particular account of indexes of vulnerability due to climatic factors and anthropogenic actions, of the political-institutional framework and of the socioeconomic conditions. Eight eco-regions located in the sub-humid, dry and semi-arid climatic zones were identified. They cover approximately 45 per cent of the total Central American land area, or 242,699 km², of which 178,011 km² are seriously degraded and under serious threat of desertification. Particular attention was drawn to the fact that these areas are mainly mountainous and present severe geomorphological difficulties for agriculture and cattle production.

120. El Niño affects Central America and the Caribbean subregion more than other subregions. Since 1982 it has hit the area five times, causing prolonged periods of drought and high annual precipitation, like Hurricane Mitch, which caused disaster in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador in 1998. In Honduras, the Lenca indigenous group was one of the few that successfully overcame the effects of Hurricane Mitch thanks to the use of sustainable, centuries-old land management and agricultural techniques. The World Bank has expressed its intention to promote these traditional practices as crucial instruments for land protection, and to replicate them in other vulnerable areas.

121. Almost 35 million people live in the subregion, and that number is expected to rise to 46 million by 2020. Eighty per cent of the population is concentrated in 25 per cent of the territory, corresponding to the "Logistic Central American corridor". Spanning the Pacific coastline, this is where all the large installations and major infrastructure are located and where urbanization will probably increase.

122. Against this background, poverty is one of the major factors threatening natural resources, owing to the lack of alternative options to satisfy the basic needs of the population. Seventy-one per cent of the rural population is poor, 50 per cent in the urban areas. The poor mainly live in marginal and fragile zones where the problems associated with steep slopes are aggravated by the high demand for wood, water and food, causing deforestation (the subregion's annual rate is among the highest in the world), land degradation and environmental pollution.

123. The weakness of existing sustainable development programmes, the inadequacy of institutional capacity to control the territory and the legal constraints on the utilization of natural resources make the region even more prone to desertification. In rare cases, programmes include property rights, rational land management, impact of activities of large investors and payment for environmental services.

124. The experience in the subregion of monitoring and early warning systems based on participative planning and implementation by local stakeholders can be very useful in addressing the fatalistic attitude that overwhelms local people after a disaster occurs, when they are not properly informed and not aware of positive experiences in similar situations. Moreover, joint formulation of monitoring and early warning systems and action plans strengthens the commitment of the different actors and encourages them to share responsibility for implementation.

Synergy in Central American countries

125. Inter-institutional coordination has taken place at national and subregional level, both before and after the Rio summit. This is a requirement for countries that share ecosystems, to avoid overlapping and to maximize synergistic effects.

126. The NFPs have formulated a preliminary project for promoting synergy among the Rio conventions and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands at the national and subregional level in Central America. The main objective of the project is to capitalize on national, subregional, regional and international efforts to implement the conventions and maximize the benefits of technological transfer and financial support by identifying converging, interlinked and common issues among the conventions. The first result would be, in the national context, the harmonized implementation of programmes, plans and projects formulated at national and subregional levels, which apply an ecosystem approach based on the close links between land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change.

127. The recently created technical committee on desertification and drought of the Central American Commission for the Environment and Development (CCAD), could play a fundamental role in catalyzing support. In fact, the CCAD, at its thirty-second ordinary meeting held in Nicaragua, in January 2002, affirmed that the technical committee was intended to consider combating desertification and drought as a policy priority for subregional action. The committee was created in the aftermath of the serious drought of 2001, when the Central American ministers of the environment requested technical assistance to assess the social, economic and environmental impacts of drought and draw up a subregional mitigation and prevention strategy for reducing the impact of similar events in the future. The committee, constituted by the UNCCD national focal points, held its first meeting in April 2002 and is currently preparing a calendar of activities for 2002-2003 that focuses on NAP formulation in the seven countries of the subregion and on synergies in implementation of these activities.

D. Hispaniola subregional action programme

128. In 2001, the Dominican Republic, with the support of the Global Mechanism and the Investment Centre of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), started work on formulating an action plan for the transboundary area (PAN-FRO) to assess the conditions particular to the border zone with Haiti.

129. An inter-institutional working group carried out and finalized a preliminary study in January 2002. It has collected and systematized considerable amounts of information, scattered throughout the country, resulting from decades of research and analysis of the environmental and socioeconomic conditions of that area. Thus, it represents an appropriate platform for future bilateral cooperation to improve the living conditions of local populations and to stop and reverse the severe natural resource degradation in the area.

130. This transboundary area covers 10,845 km² where most of the 500,000 inhabitants live in poverty. This is, for example, the case of the Elías Piña province. Furthermore, El Niño has recently given rise to atypical atmospheric phenomena, lengthening the normal dry periods and worsening the already severe hydrological deficit in most provinces.

131. As for the legal and institutional framework, the Dominican Republic has a well developed set of environmental laws and policies on land, water, biological and human resources. The border area is a priority within the country's development strategy. The objective of the recently created Secretariat for Natural Resources and Environment (SEMARENA) is to establish rules and norms for environmental conservation, protection, improvement and restoration, which would ensure the sustainable and rational use of natural resources through cooperation with other government institutions in the area.

132. Currently, a set of programmes and projects specifically designed for the transboundary area, or with major indirect impacts on it, are being implemented. None of them has been expressly formulated within the framework of the UNCCD. Nevertheless, they can contribute significantly to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. However, much remains to be done, especially in achieving concrete and effective cooperation with the neighbouring country, once the institutional framework in Haiti has been adequately improved.

E. Integration of priority activities to combat desertification within the framework of the ACP/EU Partnership Agreement

133. The process of bringing the ACP and the UNCCD secretariats closer together started with the first consultative meeting, held in Brussels, Belgium, in October 2000, between the ACP committee of ambassadors and the UNCCD secretariat. On that occasion, the existing linkages between the Cotonou partnership agreement (Benin, June 2000) and the UNCCD Convention were recognized. They are based on partnership building through common principles: bottom-up approach and grass-root involvement of concerned communities, and the similar objectives to eradicate poverty by targeting the

use of natural resources to achieve sustainable development in the countries concerned.

134. The two secretariats have entered into consultations with a view to catalyzing national coordination and assisting the ACP countries to select and integrate priority activities to combat desertification at the national level and support strategies under the Cotonou agreement at the regional level. The recommendations were collected and officially formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding (Belgium, May 2001).

135. Several consultative meetings have been organized with the Caribbean countries (Germany, April 2001; Jamaica, May 2001; Switzerland, October 2001) to inform participants of developments in the implementation of the Convention, to highlight the cooperation opportunities offered by the new process and to promote the inclusion of combating land degradation and drought mitigation in national and regional support strategies. National and regional indicative programmes currently under preparation with the technical and expert support of the UNCCD secretariat to specific Caribbean country Parties should also be included.

136. In spite of this, only the Dominican Republic has been able to include land degradation and drought issues in its Country Support Strategy and National Indicative Programme. Other countries have been unable to do so because the EU agenda for ACP cooperation had already been set. The alternative was to include these issues in the regional strategy, formulation of which began in September 2001. To this end, the following recommendations were made: to increase the role of the UNCCD NFPs in the process, in particular to introduce regular consultations with national authorizing officers and other representatives of ministries involved in the formulation of the strategy; to organize information campaigns in the national media to create and consolidate public awareness of the need to include UNCCD priority projects in the strategy; and to strengthen the consultative dialogue among donor countries and institutions with a view to including UNCCD priority projects in the rolling programming.

V. PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMME

137. The RAP was formally approved at the third regional meeting (Cuba, March 1997), following intensive consultations at previous meetings. Some of the main components of the RAP are presented here.

A. Benchmarks and indicators for monitoring desertification in Latin America and the Caribbean

138. The project concerning the development of indicators and monitoring tools to promote science-based policies for dryland protection against desertification started in 2000 after the workshop on methodology (Mexico, February 1999) was held with the financial support of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The project is in its last phase and will conclude in August 2002, but information can be provided about the methodology followed and the main outcomes anticipated.

139. The project, which received a financial contribution from the GEF and assistance from the Natural Heritage Institute, involves governments, NGOs, local communities and academic institutions in Brazil, Chile and Mexico. The main objective is to design a possible model framework for assessing and integrating indicators that could help decision-makers evaluate the physical, social and economic patterns that threaten dryland biological resources through the identification of the immediate, intermediate and ultimate causes of land degradation and biodiversity loss as well as community impacts in dryland areas.

140. Some areas for pilot projects were selected in each country on the basis of a number of criteria, including the presence of significant biodiversity; the degree of desertification; the level of poverty associated with migration rates and other socioeconomic factors; the availability of data for the areas and the willingness of local communities to participate in the project.

141. A number of biophysical and socioeconomic indicators have been identified, with a view to their potential application at the country and regional levels. A field manual containing standardized criteria and procedures has been prepared for assessing biophysical and socioeconomic indicators. A new software tool called Monitor for integrating data and evaluating trends among the indicators in the pilot areas will be tested by community and government decision-makers and undergo strict quality control. The experiences gained will be disseminated in the region, in accordance with the RAP.

*Development of benchmarks and indicators on drought
and land degradation in the Caribbean*

142. In accordance with decision 5 of the seventh regional meeting (Chile, August 2001), the secretariat was requested to organize a workshop on benchmarks and indicators for the countries of the Caribbean subregion. The basic idea behind this exercise is to begin working on the development of standards that the countries can use to determine, *inter alia*, the changes in land degradation and drought in the subregion and assess the results of the plans and programmes implemented.

B. Desertification information network for the LAC region

143. The RAP provided for the establishment of DESELAC, a regional system of information and communication among actors engaged in combating desertification. At the fourth regional meeting (Antigua and Barbuda, April/May 1998), country Parties defined the objectives and characteristics of the electronic information network, which has its central node in the UNCCD RCU in Mexico City.

144. DESELAC was conceived as a regional interactive link among existing electronic networks and available databases at the national, subregional and regional levels. Its aim was to integrate, consolidate and exchange relevant data and information on desertification and drought, thus ensuring continuous and systematic monitoring of the affected areas, *inter alia*, through dissemination of research and studies into the issues, particularly technical

and scientific data, including socioeconomic and biophysical indicators, geographical and statistical information, good practices and success stories replicable in the region.

145. With the support of the secretariat, a preliminary database was set up which identified resource requirements and assessed the capacity-building needs of the whole region.

146. A mailing list has been created to connect all UNCCD focal points in the region, experts, relevant NGOs, community-based organizations and others having an interest in finding sustainable solutions to land degradation and other environmental problems in LAC. The list has been continuously expanded and currently contains more than 750 addresses, including scientific institutions and secondary learning institutions. The list allows, *inter alia*, the holding of on-line conferences and distribution of the monthly newsletter prepared by the secretariat.

147. Some country Parties received financial or technical support to enhance their national capacities and configure their electronic systems in line with the technology and the architecture used for DESELAC. The aim was to facilitate communication with and within the network. To date, only a few countries have requested installation of national DESELAC nodes.

148. The steps undertaken to date have not been sufficient to make DESELAC into the decentralized and innovative management tool for which country Parties called at the regional meetings. A number of shortcomings have prevented the network from developing its full potential. Notwithstanding the importance of the issues under discussion, the electronic conferences organized have been attended by only a very limited number of participants and countries. The amount of information exchanged on the network has been far below expectation. The different languages used still represent an obstacle to the smooth running of the system and the secretariat is currently looking for ways to overcome this problem.

149. The fact that the RCU has not been functioning properly since 2000 represents the most important constraint on the full implementation and operation of DESELAC. At the moment, there is no secure and predictable source of funding for the RCU, since no decision was taken by the COP at its fifth session on inclusion of the costs in the core budget of the secretariat.

150. The UNCCD secretariat is currently working on reactivating the regional coordination unit based at the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/ROLAC) in Mexico City. Negotiations with UNEP/ROLAC on the provision of working space for the UNCCD RCU are in their final stages. Once these are completed, a coordinator will be appointed to handle the overall management of the RCU. DESELAC, in particular, would be a major priority for the RCU and, as a consequence, significant improvements in the development and functioning of the network are expected in the near future.

C. Integrated watershed management in Latin America and the Caribbean

151. The growing shortage of water available to populations in Latin American and Caribbean is of great concern. There is an imperative need to study the major causes of the problem and find effective measures to resolve it. The collection of relevant data for use in future strategic planning for sustainable socioeconomic development, and education and information are key factors that must be considered for water resources management, mitigating the effects of drought and combating desertification.

152. In this context, the first regional workshop on integrated watershed management in LAC (Venezuela, September 2001) was a very positive exercise to promote comprehensive studies on the major causes of the problems, which will provide adequate and reliable data and analyses for future strategic and integrated planning. The meeting received financial support from Germany and Italy, and technical assistance from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The latter prepared a comprehensive study on priority activities in the field of transboundary water resources management within the context of the RAP.

153. Attended by more than 90 delegates and representatives from LAC countries, international institutions and NGOs, the meeting can be considered as the first step in a results-oriented process under a regional water programme shortly to be developed. The focus has been put, among other things, on water availability and watershed management, paying particular attention to the links with land degradation, desertification and drought. The aim is to formulate technical and political solutions to the problems identified, using the (micro-) watershed as the management unit, promote awareness and participation among all stakeholders, develop methods and procedures that are based on equity as a social function, and promote equal rights and the free access of all stakeholders to this common valuable resource. The need to identify the main technical and institutional bottlenecks, *inter alia*, for data collection and information sharing, was stressed in order to develop effective early warning systems for flood control and drought preparedness activities, and to foster cooperation for the integrated management of water resources of transboundary rivers, lakes and hydro-geological basins.

154. It emerged from the meeting that fully participatory and integrated management of water, considered in the first instance as an environmental and social resource and as an element of social stability, must be guaranteed to avoid conflicts associated with their use. To that end, it was necessary to provide stakeholders with the information, education and knowledge they required to participate in the decision-making process and in the implementation of actions relating to water management and conservation.

155. Based on an ecosystem approach, it was recommended that preventive measures and early warning systems covering all relevant risks, such as drought, floods and land degradation, and based on common guidelines, benchmarks and indicators, should be set up as a matter of urgency, not least through effective regional and international coordination and cooperation.

156. The main result of the meeting was that countries of the region agreed on the need to develop an integrated regional programme on water, based on the watershed as the management unit. The aim is to assess regional water distribution, identify priority areas, design an environmental management system, establish institutional and legal frameworks for transboundary watershed management, and set education and training programmes for users and managers, promoting at the same time traditional knowledge, clean technologies and best practices. There are new proposals for programme formulation which will be discussed within the region in the near future.

D. Interregional platform of cooperation between Africa and LAC

157. Since its inception and launch (Brazil, 1998), the platform has focused on measures to strengthen national institutional and human capacities and on increasing the number and quality of opportunities available to countries in the fields of knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices and access to technical and financial resources. The measures identified derive, in principle, from a clear definition of objectives and their location within the broad matrix of priorities as defined at national or regional level.

158. To this day, the constant dialogue generated by the platform has helped countries in both regions to adopt and implement concrete actions that have directly contributed towards the advancement of the UNCCD's objectives. After the conclusion of the partnership agreements, workshops and training courses have been organized for technicians of the two regions with the support of Portugal and Venezuela. Currently, four projects concerning the creation of youth environmental brigades are being implemented in Benin, Cap Verde, Mozambique and Niger thanks to the voluntary contributions of Germany and Venezuela.

159. The Third High-Level Forum on Cooperation between Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean (Venezuela, February 2002) was a further opportunity for direct consultations among participant countries. Over 115 delegates from 43 countries of the regions participated in the forum. The President of Venezuela, the Prime Ministers of Mozambique and Niger, ministers of 16 countries, and representatives of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as various national authorities were among the participants.

160. Participants stressed that South-South cooperation represented at the international level a valuable and necessary tool to reverse the process of desertification, make efficient use of resources and generate the necessary resources to combat poverty in the affected areas. They called upon the international community to provide financial, scientific and technological support to developing countries in combating desertification and poverty, emphasized the role of private sector in achieving these objectives, noted that synergies could enhance the potential to implement the platform, and underscored the need to facilitate access to financing and make more efficient use of resources, including the need for countries to contribute concretely to the efforts to implement the platform of cooperation.

161. However, implementation of the platform still lags behind expectations, owing to the lack of financial resources. As a consequence, delegates stressed the need for a joint pledge to secure the predictable financial resources essential to carrying out projects and programmes under the UNCCD and to guaranteeing the sustainability of the planned activities in accordance with the priorities outlined in the NAPs. In particular, the importance of the GEF becoming the UNCCD financing mechanism was stressed, as was the need to identify innovative sources of funding. Additionally, it was proposed that the secretariat should enter into consultations with the GEF to explore possibilities for designing a financing mechanism, similar to the small grants developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to enhance NGO participation at the national level, through a fast-track approval project cycle.

162. The President of the Forum, H.E. Mr. H. Chavez, will submit the Caracas Declaration, together with the programmes and activities identified, to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

163. The regional and subregional action programmes in LAC are progressing steadily. While countries are genuinely interested in regional cooperation on programme implementation, it is evident that predictable sources of funding from the international community are needed to make steady progress.

164. Concrete initiatives must be undertaken urgently in order to boost the process of implementing Agenda 21 and building, in a fully fledged participatory process, relying on coherent partnerships at the local, national and international levels, particularly in the areas of finance and technology transfer.

A. Participatory processes involving civil society, non-governmental and community-based organizations

165. There is a broadening consensus that only an integrated approach to the problems of poverty and environmental degradation can result in sustainable development. Of the priority actions that must be undertaken in the region in this regard, empowering local communities is one major step towards poverty eradication and environmental protection, human resources and institutional capacity building, livelihood and job creation, and equity for women.

166. Thus, social cohesion and inclusion must be promoted, since they are indispensable to a continuous and participative dialogue among all stakeholders, which will lead to the required consensus around key policy reforms.

167. The participatory process is acquiring increasing importance in the region as one of the major driving forces of sustainable development. The trend is towards decentralization of state policies and programmatic frameworks. The growing capacity for mobilizing local communities reflects

the principle that decisions should not be made for, but by, the people themselves.

168. Despite its limited resources, the secretariat has supported grass-roots participation, empowering community-based organizations and NGOs by facilitating their participation in international meetings, in the set-up and functioning of RIOD-LAC, in organizing activities at the national and regional levels (such as awareness-raising seminars and campaigns, formulation and implementation of capacity-building and field projects, debates within RIOD-LAC to monitor the achievements of the network, detecting failures and identifying opportunities). The contributions have been small but have certainly reinforced partnerships between local communities and governments. One positive indication of this trend is the increased number of NGOs accredited to the fifth session of the COP.

169. However, more needs to be done. At their last regional meeting (Cuba, May 2001), the representatives of RIOD-LAC drew attention to the need to introduce budgetary lines into the NAPs for civil society participation; include RIOD-LAC national representatives on the NCBs; and improve communication facilities among regional members.

B. Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements

170. Countries of the region have, especially in recent years, set up a solid legislative framework for intervening effectively in initiatives to promote sustainable development and the successful implementation of the Convention. Among other things, they have introduced land tenure reforms, set limits on natural resource use, especially forests, extended protected areas and promoted the participatory process. However, the countries of the region should make major efforts to strengthen preventive (incentives) and reactive (command and control) regulation instruments.

171. In many cases, the entire body of legislation has been rationalized to eliminate obsolete or conflicting laws and rules and introduce integrated legislative instruments to deal with macro-economic policy, social affairs, indebtedness and trade. The incorporation of environmental criteria into domestic funding policies, however, is still in its early stages.

172. At the regional and subregional levels, institutional affairs have commanded most attention. While waiting for adequate technical and financial resources to be channelled to them, country Parties have created or upgraded the set of institutions they needed to implement the programmes formulated, as in the case of the Gran Chaco and the Puna Americana. These shared institutional mechanisms are neither politically independent nor economically autonomous. Their functioning depends entirely on continuity and on the level of support given to them by the respective national bodies.

C. Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusions of partnership agreements

173. Funding remains the most important constraint on the implementation of regional and subregional activities. The international community does not

perceive the region as being seriously affected by land degradation or drought. This perception certainly has a significant influence on the level of financial and technical resources made available. While the secretariat is constantly trying to catalyse efforts in the region, LAC countries could surely do more to mobilize internal funds and to heighten awareness of the situation in the region, as described in the national reports, so that RAP and SRAP activities are made priorities.

174. Integrated watershed management could be chosen as the common cross-cutting issue to promote the sustainable use and protection of ecosystem resources. Countries of the region have already had the opportunity to assess progress attained at the national level and to distil important lessons which encourage a spirit of openness and sharing. The RAP could be an appropriate framework for integrated transboundary watershed management, assuring linkages with sustainable development strategies, poverty eradication policies, land management and assuring the involvement of women and young people. Land protection is crucial to increasing water retention, and sustainable and environmentally sound agricultural practices combined with traditional or new knowledge and technologies, can ensure clean production and better water use.

175. The Global Mechanism has promoted some actions leading to the mobilization and channelling of financial and technical resources for the implementation of the Convention in a number of countries of the region. These efforts are not sufficient in the long term compared with the enormous needs identified by the programmes. A considerable number of activities agreed at meetings and forums are still pending due to the lack of funding, and the follow-up of successful projects is at risk for the same reason. Strengthening existing partnerships in the region may be only a partial solution to future needs in terms of financial and human resources. Bilateral, regional and multilateral actors should provide sustained support to the ongoing process. The resources made available to activities are the only true measure of the commitment of those actors.

176. In this respect and in accordance with the call made by ministers at the Thirteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean (Brazil, October 2001), the establishment of the GEF as the main financial instrument of the Convention would enable a more strategic, substantive and clear-cut focus on the concerted actions required to implement the Convention at the regional and subregional levels and to put those programmes into full operation.

D. Linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies

177. In a number of regional and international meetings, LAC ministers and representatives have stressed the need to identify synergy among the Rio conventions and to formulate concrete working plans, including starting a coordination process that will bring benefits to countries and the region as a whole.

178. The results of the four national workshops already organized in LAC and the experience of other regions are a solid basis for explaining the implementation procedures and reporting requirements under the different conventions. They also clarify key elements in the decision-making process that are common to the conventions, namely: emphasis on participatory development, integrated programming, partnership arrangements and consultative aspects of a country-driven implementation process. National policies should be harmonized through integrated programmes, as is already the case in some countries of the region.

179. A synergistic approach would help in promoting the benefits of, for instance, the environmental services of forests and agro-forest systems, such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity, soil and water conservation, scenic beauty and others.

180. Drought and desertification early warning systems could take advantage of operational meteorological observation systems. Here, Central American countries and Cuba could play a pivotal role, since they have developed valuable experience in the framework of other international legal instruments and their experience can be replicated in other countries of the region.

E. Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought

181. The natural disasters which have occurred in recent years and the increase in both their direct and indirect costs in terms of human losses and the financial burden, constitute a heavy mortgage on development in the countries of the region. Prevention and mitigation of desertification and drought require clear definition of risk management, early analysis of existing threats and vulnerabilities and the implementation of risk management mechanisms.

182. Regional and international financial institutions, together with bilateral and multilateral donors, play an essential role in funding prevention and mitigation activities in the region and supporting, on a predictable and sustainable basis, the establishment and operation of effective early warning systems.

183. Cooperation among LAC countries is paramount and best practises must be disseminated as widely as possible to benefit other parts of the region, for instance, the experience of land rehabilitation acquired in Ecuador and Chile is potentially replicable all over the region.

F. Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment

184. Evaluating and mitigating the effects of desertification in the region will not be effective if causal links are not clearly established between desertification and its root causes, and corresponding strategies identified. The assessment and monitoring of drought and desertification processes in LAC should receive priority attention and be promoted through closer interlinkages with measures undertaken at the national and regional levels.

185. Specific benchmarks and indicators should be developed for a wide range of factors, such as biophysical conditions, sustainable socioeconomic development and politico-institutional aspects in the region, using standardized methodologies. Only up-to-date information will enable the countries of the region to determine whether their endeavours to address land degradation and curb its negative effects have been successful. Although it is of paramount importance to build and strengthen human resource and institutional capacities for generating, processing and disseminating information, the monitoring tools should be simple, user-friendly and capable of being operated by communities and decision-makers with little experience in using computer-based models and software.

186. The NFPs should receive support for promoting interactions between existing national databases and other subregional, regional and international information systems, with the aim of consolidating scientific information on desertification control, the prevention and mitigation of the effects of drought, land and water management, vegetative cover and biomass protection. Permanent communication should be established between the scientific community and decision-makers, as well as field-level end-users to whom information should be transferred on a regular basis. DESELAC can play a very important role in this regard, for data collection and the dissemination of information.

G. Access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how

187. There are good opportunities in LAC countries for the exchange of information and for innovative cooperation schemes that take advantage of available knowledge and experience to reverse land degradation processes. The region is an enormous wealth of traditional knowledge and best practices which need to be recorded and made available world-wide.

188. Many institutions have already started collecting specific knowledge and techniques that native populations have developed through centuries and applied within their own environmental and cultural contexts. Traditional knowledge and practices offer a broad range of opportunities for cooperation within the region. Researchers have in fact identified similarities and complementarities among distinct environments where this enormous knowledge can be put into practice.

189. Sharing available capacities, diverse experiences and even limited resources is therefore crucial to a process which aims to ensure true cooperation and sound results in bridging capability gaps. Once again, the initiatives envisaged require secure funding at the national and international levels.

Annex I

LIST OF COUNTRY PARTIES HAVING SUBMITTED THEIR NATIONAL REPORTS

Country	Date of ratification	Date of submission of second national report
1. Antigua and Barbuda	06/06/1997	26/04/2002
2. Argentina	06/01/1997	25/04/2002
3. Barbados	14/05/1997	02/05/2002
4. Bahamas	11/10/2000	07/07/2002
5. Belize	23/07/1998	
6. Bolivia	01/08/1996	11/04/2002
7. Brazil	08/06/1999	26/04/2002
8. Chile	11/11/1997	26/04/2002
9. Colombia	08/06/1999	25/04/2002
10. Costa Rica	08/01/1998	24/04/2002
11. Cuba	13/03/1997	22/04/2002
12. Dominica	08/12/1997	
13. Dominican Republic	26/06/1997	25/04/2002
14. Ecuador	06/09/1995	03/05/2002
15. El Salvador	27/06/1997	22/04/2002
16. Grenada	28/05/1997	24/04/2002
17. Guatemala	10/09/1998	30/04/2002
18. Guyana	26/06/1997	12/04/2002
19. Haiti	25/09/1996	17/05/2002
20. Honduras	25/06/1997	25/04/2002
21. Jamaica	12/11/1997	
22. Mexico	03/04/1995	
23. Nicaragua	17/02/1998	30/04/2002
24. Panama	04/04/1996	22/04/2002
25. Paraguay	15/01/1997	26/04/2002
26. Peru	09/11/1995	25/04/2002
27. Saint Kitts and Nevis	30/06/1997	
28. Saint Lucia	02/07/1997	29/04/2002
29. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	16/03/1998	22/04/2002
30. Suriname	01/06/2000	03/05/2002
31. Trinidad and Tobago	08/06/2000	07/05/2002
32. Uruguay	17/02/1999	02/05/2002
33. Venezuela	29/06/1998	02/05/2002

Annex II

STATUS OF ACTION PROGRAMMES AND NATIONAL FORUMS/WORKSHOPS

Country	Status of national action programme	Date of national forum
Antigua and Barbuda	In preparation	
Argentina	Concluded	
Barbados	Draft version	
Bahamas		
Belize		
Bolivia	Concluded	
Brazil	National policy approved	
Chile	Concluded	
Colombia	In preparation	
Costa Rica	In preparation	
Cuba	Concluded	
Dominica		
Dominican Republic	In preparation	
Ecuador	Draft version	
El Salvador	National policy approved	
Grenada	In preparation	May 2001
Guatemala	Draft version	
Guyana		
Haiti	In preparation	
Honduras		
Jamaica	Draft version	
Mexico	Concluded	
Nicaragua	Draft version	
Panama		
Paraguay	In preparation	
Peru	Concluded	
Saint Kitts and Nevis		June 2001
Saint Lucia		May 2001
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	In preparation	April 2001
Suriname		April 2001
Trinidad and Tobago		
Uruguay	In preparation	
Venezuela	Draft version	

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