



**UNITED
NATIONS**



**Convention to Combat
Desertification**

Distr.
GENERAL

ICCD/CRIC(1)/9
15 October 2002

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION
First session
Rome, 11-22 November 2002
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE PROMOTION AND STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH
OTHER RELEVANT CONVENTIONS AND RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS,
INSTITUTIONS AND AGENCIES**

Note by the secretariat

The present document provides a review of activities for the promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions. The information on collaboration with relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies is contained in ICCD/CRIC(1)/7 and ICCD/CRIC(1)/7/Add.1, which review information provided by relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, on their activities in support of the preparation and implementation of action programmes under the Convention.

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. BACKGROUND	1 - 9	3
II. PROMOTION AND STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER RELEVANT CONVENTIONS	10 - 36	6
A. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	10 - 18	6
B. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	19 - 21	8
C. UNCCD/CBD/UNFCCC Joint Liaison Group	22 - 31	9
D. Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)	32 - 33	12
E. Ramsar Convention on Wetlands	34 - 36	12
III. NATIONAL SYNERGY WORKSHOPS PROGRAMME	37 - 42	13
A. Background and objectives of the programme	37 - 40	13
B. Lessons learned and future developments	41 - 42	14

I. BACKGROUND

1. The challenge posed by the intricate impact of climate change, loss of biological diversity, drought and desertification on social, economic and environmental conditions in many countries has been exemplified in recent times. It has also been amply demonstrated that there is a clear convergence of objectives among the three multilateral environmental conventions, and that there is a need for a reorientation of the strategic approaches that have hitherto been pursued by the various interested parties, particularly at the level of individual countries.

2. In particular, in order more concretely to address the issue of sustainable development, and to achieve environmental security, there is a need for the various actors to focus more on a broader framework encompassing, *inter alia*, desertification and land management, biological diversity, climate change and socio-economic development, which have been addressed by the three Rio conventions separately.

3. Article 8 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) explicitly addresses its relationship with other Rio conventions, in particular with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Parties are encouraged to coordinate their activities under other relevant international agreements, particularly the UNFCCC and the CBD, in order to derive maximum benefit from activities under each agreement while avoiding duplication of effort.

4. The need for a synergistic approach has been repeatedly recognized at the level of Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the conventions. The governing bodies of the conventions have taken relevant decisions in urging countries and secretariats of the three conventions to take advantage of, and build upon, the existing links among them and thereby to add value to their individual implementation processes.

5. The COP to the UNCCD has through various decisions called for closer collaboration among the Rio conventions and other relevant international organizations and conventions. At its fifth session (COP 5), the COP endorsed the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group and expressed its support for the integration of approaches between the UNFCCC, CBD and UNCCD. The COP 5 also requested the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to include in its programme of work consideration of land and soil degradation and its linkages to other environmental conventions. In addition, the COP 5 requested the CST to enhance cooperation with the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the CBD and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) of the UNFCCC, and to report to the sixth session of the COP on such cooperation. The COP 5 also encouraged relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies to promote synergies in their mobilization of resources in support of the objectives of the UNCCD.

6. Country Parties to the UNCCD have on many occasions emphasized the need to develop and promote synergies among the Rio conventions as a means of fostering their implementation, in particular at the country level. The process of reporting on progress made in the implementation of national action programmes (NAPs), as well as regional meetings organized by the UNCCD secretariat preparatory to the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), provided the opportunity for country Parties to present their views on successes and shortcomings in the achievement of synergies among the conventions and to express their needs in this respect.

7. In this context, a number of recommendations for possible action in promoting synergies was put forward by country Parties:

a) There is a need to integrate action programmes of environmental conventions with national sustainable development strategies, in particular in such areas as poverty reduction, science and education, agriculture, forestry, energy and water supply;

b) It is also necessary to strengthen synergies with those legal instruments dealing with the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources critical to the survival of arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid ecosystems and people living in affected areas. Better linkages between the National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) under the UNFCCC and NAPAs to combat desertification would increase the benefits of these programmes, especially for affected least developed countries (LDCs);

c) The UNCCD and Global Environment Facility (GEF) national focal points should liaise more closely among themselves and with the focal points of the CBD, UNFCCC and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands for a more integrated management of programmes and projects and preparation of project proposals for various donor organizations;

d) The private sector, which is expected to contribute financially to the implementation of environmental and sustainable development conventions, should be better informed about the benefits of synergies among them;

e) The search for synergies at country level should be supported by appropriate incentive systems, institutional arrangements for coordination and responsiveness by the respective COPs of the conventions and their secretariats;

f) The CST and its Group of Experts should work closely with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as well as with other initiatives, such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, to take advantage of outcomes from these bodies;

g) Technical and financial strategic alliances should be built to foster and strengthen effective regional and international cooperation and partnership, including in its South-South dimension;

h) The number of national synergy workshops should be increased in order further to enhance decision makers' capacity at country level fully to implement the conventions in a synergistic manner. Developed country Parties should provide the secretariat with voluntary funding to this effect.

8. In response to these challenges, the strategy adopted by the UNCCD secretariat towards promotion and strengthening of synergies among the conventions relies on four main pillars:

a) Strengthening institutional linkages. To this effect, partnership and cooperation agreements have been concluded with the secretariats of CBD, the UNFCCC, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Ramsar Convention;

b) Testing operational options, including capacity building initiatives, as a part of the joint work programmes managed with CBD and the UNFCCC;

c) Developing common policies and strategies. A Joint Liaison Group (JLG) at the secretariats' Executive Direction and Management level has been established, in order to promote synergistic cooperation among secretariats, to avoid job duplication and to utilize the available resources efficiently, while guaranteeing their integrity at the environmental level;

d) Supporting country-driven initiatives: in this regard, a programme of national workshops on synergies was launched at the end of 2000 and is being implemented.

9. In addition, and following the mandate received by decision 8/COP.5 to continue actively to participate in the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the secretariat has facilitated the convening of the Meeting of the Panel of Eminent Personalities to Consider the Poverty-Environment Nexus (Agadez, Niger, February 2002), and the Ministerial Forum on the Implementation of the UNCCD Preparatory to the WSSD (Praia, Cape Verde, March 2002). Both meetings discussed, *inter alia*, questions relating to the development of synergies in the framework of international environmental and sustainable development agreements.¹

¹ The report of the Meeting of the Panel of Eminent Personalities as well as the report and background document of the Ministerial Forum are available on the UNCCD web site at <http://www.unccd.int>.

II. PROMOTION AND STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER RELEVANT CONVENTIONS

A. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

10. Pursuant to the decisions by the respective Conferences of the Parties to the UNCCD and CBD, initiatives on the joint work programme between the UNCCD and CBD on the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands have been progressing steadily. This joint work programme covers the biological diversity of drylands, Mediterranean, arid, semi-arid, grassland and savannah ecosystems. In cooperation with the Agronomic Institute for Overseas (*Istituto Agronomico per l'Oltremare (IAO)*) in Florence, Italy, two training courses were organized in January and February 2002. These were aimed at strengthening the capacities of national administrations of developing countries to develop project proposals to be submitted to the GEF for funding. Twenty participants from Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Chad, Eritrea, Mozambique, Niger, Uganda and Zimbabwe attended the courses.

11. In accordance with decision V/23 of COP 5 of the CBD, an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on the Biodiversity of Dry and Sub-humid Lands was established by the SBSTTA jointly with the UNCCD secretariat. The AHTEG meeting was convened twice in Montreal, Canada, from 18 to 22 March and from 23 to 27 September 2002, with a view to carrying out the following tasks:

- To consolidate and assess information on the status and trends of biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands, on the possible establishment of an international network of dry and sub-humid areas of particular value for biodiversity, on indicators, on processes affecting biodiversity, on global benefits derived from biodiversity, and on the socio-economic impacts of its loss, including the interrelationship between biodiversity and poverty;
- To assess the progress and the effects of the specific measures that have been taken for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, for resource management and for the support of sustainable livelihoods; and
- To assess international priorities set up at the regional and global levels and to make proposals for expected outcomes, further activities, possible actors that may implement them, and timetables for action.

12. The AHTEG addressed, *inter alia*, the following matters:

- Status and trends of biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands, including indicators of the status and trends of biodiversity, monitoring and early warning systems, in a wide range of natural habitats. The group proposed action and recommendations including review of existing assessments, periodic dryland assessments, identification of areas of particular value to biodiversity, gap analysis relating to human development, use of indicators at national level, and public awareness and education, as well as capacity development in information management and use;

- Processes affecting biodiversity including the importance of addressing the underlying causes of processes affecting biodiversity. In this respect, the group recommended that effective dryland biodiversity management strategies should be an integral part of poverty reduction strategies and measures aimed at combating desertification based on lessons learned from good practices.

13. The consideration of capacity development and the need of some Parties for assistance in seeking resources to develop proposals were discussed at length. The expert group welcomed the "Operational guidelines for expedited funding of national self assessments of capacity building needs²", spearheaded by the GEF, which aims at assisting the capacity building of developing countries. The group agreed that all Parties should be invited:

- To undertake the comprehensive self-assessment sought by the Capacity Development Initiative (CDI) in order quickly to identify and fill gaps, paying particular attention to developing countries' conditions;
- To have more focused support to improve project development and management skills amongst some dry and sub-humid lands Parties; a lack of such skills inhibits their ability to access necessary and available financial support for their work on behalf of both CBD and the UNCCD;
- To ensure that critical capacity constraints identified in the overall project ("institutional strengthening and enabling activities") comply with the project in order to achieve an enhancing of national capacities in a sustainable and cost-effective manner;
- To review and where necessary amend their working practices in order to ensure that work in support of all the three Rio conventions is fully coordinated and therefore cost-effective in achieving sustainable development and promoting synergy;
- To consider the capacity available to bring the value of biological diversity to civil society within the dry and sub-humid lands, being particularly aware of the fact that the survival of human beings in these fragile lands is often a pressing concern;
- To build capacity in understanding traditional value systems so that they can be properly included in non-use economic valuation.

14. The group reviewed the value and uses of the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands, focusing on global benefits and taking into account traditional knowledge. The group agreed that the value of dry and sub-humid land biodiversity resides not only in its direct and indirect uses, but also in its socio-cultural and spiritual benefits, and concluded that most of the identified benefits of dry and sub-humid land biodiversity are of a global nature.

² This document is available on the GEF web site at <http://www.gefweb.org>.

15. The group also considered the issue of cooperation with all relevant conventions, in particular with the UNCCD, with respect to, *inter alia*, the sustainable use of the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands, the application of an ecosystem approach, and assessment of the status and trends of this biological diversity as well as the threats to it. Reference was made to several interregional cooperation meetings between the countries of Africa and Latin America, in particular the Third African-Latin American and Caribbean Interregional Forum organized by the UNCCD secretariat in Caracas, Venezuela, in February 2002.³

16. Harmonizing sectoral policies and instruments to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands were considered, including, *inter alia*, by taking advantage of the existing NAPs under the UNCCD, as well as, as appropriate, other existing and relevant sectoral plans and policies. It was noted that many NAPs in various fields relating to biological diversity have been designed and implemented by the country Parties.

17. The results of the work of the expert group will be presented to the eighth meeting of the SBSTTA in March 2003. The UNCCD secretariat is closely involved in the work of this expert group.

18. The UNCCD secretariat also participated in the first and second meetings of the CBD Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biological Diversity and Climate Change (Helsinki, Finland, January 2002, and Montreal, Canada, September 2002), as well as in the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (The Hague, the Netherlands, April 2002).

B. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

19. The decisions of the UNCCD COP calling for collaboration among the Rio conventions have been adopted with the full realization that there are commonalities among these sustainable development related conventions. The rationale of avoiding overlaps and taking advantage of the synergies and complementarity that could be developed among them is also an important consideration, which has been pointed out by the COP. Pursuant to these decisions and the recommendations by the SBSTA of the UNFCCC regarding cooperation with other environmental conventions, the secretariats of the two conventions, through a series of consultative meetings, have identified a number of areas where collaboration can be enhanced, the main ones being the following:

- Methodological issues such as adaptation strategies in countries with arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas; land use, land-use change and forestry issues;
- Information systems;
- National profiles and national action programmes to combat desertification;
- Issues relating to national communications and national reports, including guidelines, assessments and reviews.

³ The report and declaration from this Forum are available on the UNCCD web site at <http://www.unccd.int>.

20. Having in view these broad areas, synergistic approaches can be developed, and the following are some suggestions as to possible activities:

- Involvement of stakeholders in various aspects of the two conventions through education, training and awareness-raising;
- Cost-effective and efficient ways of disseminating relevant data and information generated by the subsidiary bodies of the two conventions;
- Joint capacity-building initiatives at the country level, involving the coordinating bodies of the two conventions and other actors. This may include, for example, the GEF-supported CDI with the ongoing country capacity needs self-assessments, which represents a good pivotal point for joint collaboration at country level;
- Sustainable energy management initiatives, for example promotion of biomass energy;
- Support to development of soil and water conservation techniques at the local level;
- Formulation of small-scale carbon sequestration projects at community level;
- Support to small-scale rural community-based initiatives for rehabilitation of degraded lands;
- Support to integrated early warning systems at country level for food security and other areas;
- Enhancement of synergy in preparation of national communications and national reports;
- Support to targeted small-scale initiatives and projects for sustainable alternative livelihood systems.

21. The UNCCD secretariat participated in COP 7 of the UNFCCC (Marrakesh, Morocco, October/November 2001), as well as the sixteenth session of the SBSTA (Bonn, Germany, June 2002).

C. UNCCD/CBD/UNFCCC Joint Liaison Group

22. The UNFCCC SBSTA, at its fourteenth session, endorsed the formation of a JLG between the secretariats of the UNFCCC and CBD. It requested the secretariat of the UNFCCC to invite the secretariat of the UNCCD to participate in this JLG in order to enhance coordination between the three conventions, and to explore options for further cooperation, including the possibility of a joint work plan and/or a workshop. In response to this invitation, the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD joined the JLG.

23. The SBSTA, at its fifteenth session, requested the JLG to collect and share information on the work programmes and operations of each convention including: (i) roles and responsibilities of the secretariats, and any relevant scientific and technical bodies or expert groups; (ii) types of activities under each convention; (iii) potential areas of cooperation, possible joint activities, and any potential conflicts associated with different mandates. It also requested the JLG to examine the possibility of holding a joint workshop before the eighteenth session of the SBSTA to explore the issues relating to inter-linkages between the three conventions. By September 2002, the JLG had met three times.

24. The first meeting of the JLG took place in Washington DC, the United States of America, on 6 December 2001. The participants included the executive secretaries of the three conventions, officers of the subsidiary bodies and members of the secretariats. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange information from recent meetings of the three conventions, to share information on plans for the forthcoming year and to explore opportunities to enhance cohesion between the three secretariats and their respective subsidiary bodies. The participants agreed that responsibility for organizing and chairing subsequent meetings would rotate among the secretariats.

25. The meeting agreed: (i) to create a common calendar of activities for posting on the respective web sites of the three conventions; (ii) to identify high priority events, which may require the participation of the staff members of other secretariats; (iii) to hold a joint workshop on synergies among the three conventions. The theme for the workshop would be "Identifying and promoting synergies between the three Rio conventions through forests and forest ecosystems". The main purpose of the workshop would be to exchange information, to identify options for further cooperation and to explore opportunities for promoting coherence among the conventions.

26. The second meeting of the JLG took place in New York, the United States of America, on 30 January 2002. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange information on the work of the subsidiary bodies, to consider a draft joint calendar and list of priority events, and to review progress in the preparations for the joint workshop on synergy approaches. The chairs of the subsidiary bodies of the three conventions reported on activities, conclusions and decisions relevant to the JLG. The meeting called for closer collaboration among the subsidiary bodies of the conventions, with a view to enhancing synergies, particularly at the country level. The meeting also agreed to proceed with identifying resources to support the joint workshop.

27. The third meeting of the JLG took place in The Hague, the Netherlands, on 16 April 2002, on the margins of the sixth session of the CBD COP. The meeting agreed to a joint calendar of events relevant to the three conventions, which was to be published on the web sites of the respective conventions. The calendar would include links providing easy access to the complete calendars of the UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD. In addition, an internal tool to facilitate the participation of members of each secretariat in key events organized by the other secretariats has been developed.

28. The possible content of the main background document for the joint workshop was discussed in detail, and the meeting agreed that the workshop should focus on the synergies between the conventions using forest and forest ecosystems as the natural resource basis for promoting linkages between the conventions, particularly at the country level.

29. The meeting also agreed that a joint exhibition by the secretariats of the three conventions would be held during the WSSD, to display information on achievements since the Earth Summit in 1992, and to provide joint programmatic and organizational information on the three conventions. In this connection, the UNCCD secretariat also facilitated a side event at the Johannesburg Summit on Watershed management and forestation to combat desertification in drylands, jointly organized by the governments of Niger and Italy, at which the impact of large-scale reforestation schemes on carbon sequestration and conservation of biodiversity in an integrated rural development project was preliminarily assessed.

30. In the long term, the following are envisaged by the JLG as key possible results of closer collaboration among the three secretariats:

- A common assessment of the potential and constraints of some key sectors in the respective agendas and strategies of the Rio conventions;
- Identification of elements for a joint approach by the Rio conventions in the various key sectors;
- Advice on possible tools for decision makers and stakeholders in the Rio conventions, spelling out the enabling steps towards formulation of appropriate decisions and programmes in some of these key sectors;
- Increased public awareness, particularly at the appropriate policy-making levels in order to support better integration of biodiversity, climate change, desertification and drought issues into national environmental policy-making processes in a holistic and coordinated manner;
- Increased level of interaction with country Parties' representatives with the objective of bringing a sharper focus onto the way forward in the development of synergistic approaches.

31. As a result of consultations among the three secretariats, it was concluded that, in line with the request from the SBSTA at its sixteenth session,⁴ a scoping paper would be prepared by the UNFCCC secretariat, in cooperation with the other two secretariats, with a view to presenting a broader scope of commonalities among the three conventions. The SBSTA would review this paper at its seventeenth session, to take place in October 2002 in New Delhi, India, and offer its views on the way forward. The UNCCD secretariat has provided relevant input to this paper and is planning to participate in the SBSTA session.

⁴ As contained in FCCC/SBSTA/2002/6.

D. Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)

32. The secretariats of the CMS and the UNCCD have agreed that there was a convergence of interests and objectives between the two conventions, and that the secretariats could enter into collaborative ventures for the benefit of their respective Parties. The two secretariats have identified fields for possible cooperation and critical sites where joint activities could be developed, and have considered the possibility of developing a joint programme of work. The following issues have emerged as a possible basis for cooperation:

- Linkages and information exchange between focal points of the CMS and UNCCD at the national level;
- Capacity building initiatives, e.g. joint training activities, which would help in implementation of the conventions at the national level;
- Information sharing at various levels, i.e. international, between the secretariats, regional, subregional, and national;
- Joint planning of activities, i.e. exchange of relevant information on project activities in their planning phase in order to ensure that objectives common to both conventions are duly taken into consideration by country Parties while implementing project activities in the field;
- Awareness raising at various levels, with particular attention to the political level;
- Integration of CMS-related issues into the UNCCD NAPs, i.e. into the section in the NAP referring to activities relating to other environmental conventions and linkages at field level.

33. The two secretariats are in the process of drafting a memorandum of understanding which will outline modalities for closer collaboration and define clear objectives on the way forward. A joint programme of work is also being prepared, taking into account what has already been agreed through various consultations. In the programme of work, a set of targeted actions would be developed, and the ways and means for carrying out the activities identified would be set out.

E. Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

34. Consultative meetings with the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands have focused on implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1998 and identification of key areas for synergy development. These include:

- Exchange of information. It has been observed that a number of wetlands in arid and semi-arid lands have not yet been designated. Parties would be encouraged to increase the number of such designated wetlands. A list or inventory was deemed necessary, and this exercise could already be started,

with an initial focus on Africa. It was also agreed that consultative forums would be sought at the country level in order to ensure, as far as possible, collaboration in the process of preparation for the COP and of relevant documents.

- Capacity strengthening was considered as crucial for the implementation of the conventions, and ways and means should be explored for developing suitable materials for outreach to various key constituencies.
- Joint activities in promoting science and technology. The sharing of experience through early warning systems needs to be encouraged. The experience gained by UNCCD Parties through CST work on benchmarks and indicators, as well as on traditional knowledge, would be exchanged. Furthermore, the rosters of experts for the two conventions should be linked through the web sites of the two secretariats.
- Areas where projects have been identified and developed (i.e. the Okavango Ecosystem, the Lake Chad Basin and the Niger/Nigeria Joint Water Programme).

35. As far as coordination of programmes of work between the two conventions was concerned, it was decided that each secretariat would encourage its respective Parties and national focal points to hold joint consultative meetings as a part of their reporting processes. In addition, it was agreed that the two secretariats would also make arrangements for holding annual consultative meetings.

36. At its sixteenth session, the SBSTA, noting potential synergies with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, encouraged the JLG to invite the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention to share information and to participate in the meetings of the JLG, as appropriate.

III. NATIONAL SYNERGY WORKSHOPS PROGRAMME

A. Background and objectives of the programme

37. At the request of a number of Parties, the UNCCD secretariat has been facilitating the organization of national workshops in selected developing countries in order to stimulate the discussion of modalities of collaboration by various stakeholders in the implementation of the three conventions. The main rationale behind this exercise is to integrate the UNCCD process into national development strategies through linkages between existing relevant sustainable development policies.

38. Generally, the objectives of the national workshops are threefold:

- To strengthen current coordination at local level, including the exchange of information, in order to achieve an optimal use of domestically available resources;

- To facilitate policy dialogue with the donor community, in order to attract financial resources towards concrete agendas for effectively addressing common objectives of the sustainable development conventions;
- To assist the conventions' secretariats in preparing and/or updating joint work plans to meet the expectations of countries, particularly in capacity building, information systems and innovative options for cooperation and assistance.

39. The national synergy workshop programme was launched in late 2000. As at September 2002, workshops have been held in Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Uganda and Tanzania), Asia (Mongolia) and Latin America and the Caribbean (Bolivia, Cuba, El Salvador and Venezuela). Additional national and subregional workshops are under preparation in Algeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Niger (subregional: Arab Maghreb Union) in Africa; Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Yemen in Asia; and Argentina, Colombia and Nicaragua (subregional: Meso-America) in Latin America and the Caribbean.

40. The workshops normally take from two to four days and are organized in close cooperation with the national focal points for the UNCCD and their counterparts for the CBD and the UNFCCC. The other stakeholders at the national level, including relevant government ministries (such as those for agriculture, forestry, water management, the environment, economic development and finance) and non-governmental organizations, have also been involved in the exercise. The involvement of local experts has also been encouraged.

B. Lessons learned and future developments

41. The UNCCD secretariat is in the process of assessing the results of the first phase of the programme. One of the most frequent observations has been that more effort is needed to develop the tools for an assessment of problems involved in joint implementation of the conventions, including possibilities for synergistic programming. The most recurrent proposals for improvements in the synergistic implementation of the conventions include the following:

- The need to strengthen local capacities for synergistic programme development was often mentioned as one of the main challenges to reaching synergies at the local level. In order to develop the tools to strengthen coordination among the key actors at national level, particularly the National Coordinating Bodies (NCBs) for the three conventions, the capacity to manage an evolving inter-ministerial and interdepartmental system of coordination needs to be developed where none exists, and to be strengthened where necessary. Ascertaining the key elements for effective coordination and programme development, and creating the possibility for each actor to play its role in the process, are crucial for this kind of endeavour;
- Overall strong political commitment to combating desertification and sustainable development in general at the national and international level is required, but also a continuous effort in dissemination of information

and awareness raising, involving all stakeholders at all levels, and in particular at the local level, involving the use of traditional knowledge wherever possible. The necessity for concrete action plans to overcome the nexus between land degradation and poverty, especially in Africa, has often been emphasized;

- Elaboration of guidelines on methodological issues, on information systems and on reporting and reviewing has also been perceived as a pressing need. This has generally been formulated as a recommendation to the secretariats of the Rio conventions and to their subsidiary bodies on science and technology.

42. The UNCCD secretariat plans to continue to support the organization of national synergy workshops. Future development of the programme is, however, dependent on some assumptions:

- Increased support to the programme. The UNCCD secretariat has launched the first phase of the national synergy workshop programme on the basis of the voluntary contributions made available by a limited number of donors and partners. The workshops have so far been organized in those countries most severely affected by drought and land degradation. Requests from other countries where biodiversity reduction and climate change are perceived as priorities could also be accommodated, provided that additional support is ensured from other funding sources, including the GEF;
- Enhanced collaboration among the conventions' secretariats. Experience shows that an effective synergy at local level can be reached only through a joint effort on the part of the conventions' secretariats; consultations among these are of great importance in assisting countries, in particular the least developed, to discharge their bureaucratic and programming tasks;
- A favourable political environment. In their recommendations, workshops have called for a number of immediate actions at the local, national and international levels. Decisions by the COPs would be needed to facilitate joint implementation, wherever practicable, as well as compliance with a number of provisions of the conventions. Priority activities could also be identified in order to combine common objectives of the three conventions with those of other relevant international conventions, organizations, institutions and agencies.

- - - - -