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**REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION AND OF ITS
INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 22,
PARAGRAPH 2(a) AND (b), AND ARTICLE 26 OF THE CONVENTION**

**Overall review of the activities of the secretariat and of progress made by
affected country Parties in implementation of the Convention**

Note by the secretariat*

SUMMARY

In the period between the third and the sixth sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) (1999-2003), the main activities that were facilitated by the secretariat have concerned the services rendered to the COP and its subsidiary bodies, policy advocacy, awareness raising, the facilitation of priority implementation processes and monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the Convention.

To date, 186 countries and one regional economic integration organization have ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and 60 country Parties have finalized their national action programmes (NAPs). In most cases, the focus has shifted from awareness raising and formulation of NAPs to the implementation phase and, more specifically, to the conclusion of partnership agreements. Through a joint work programme established with the Global Mechanism at the end of 2002, the secretariat is continuing its support to the formulation of NAPs (in line with decision 8/COP.4) and in countries having completed the process it strives to support the partnership-building process.

* The submission of this document has been delayed in order to provide the Conference of the Parties with the most up-to-date information on the ongoing activities of the UNCCD secretariat.

In addition to this, the secretariat assisted in defining frameworks for regional and subregional cooperation in all regions and now support is sought for the implementation of pilot projects. Interregional cooperation has systematically been encouraged.

With the entry into force of Annex V for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and accession to the Convention of the majority of the countries from this region, the UNCCD became a truly universal legal instrument from the point of view of its membership and the scope of application. This has increased demands from affected country Parties for activities enabling national focal points to discharge their countries' obligations under the UNCCD.

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. At its fifth session, the Conference of the Parties (COP) reviewed document ICCD/COP(5)/3, on activities relating to the implementation of the Convention which the secretariat had supported, or in which the secretariat had participated since the fourth session of the COP.

2. In the light of decisions of the COP and provisions of the Convention that refer specifically to the reporting of the secretariat, this document attempts to streamline the various reporting demands made thus far by Parties to the secretariat and to include those requests in the present document.

3. By decision 11/COP.1, paragraph 19, the secretariat was requested to prepare, after the third ordinary session and following every subsequent ordinary session of the COP, a report summarizing the conclusions of the review process. Taking into consideration the deliberations by the Parties made during the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) and the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), chapters IV and V of this document attempt to highlight the secretariat's contribution to major developments in the implementation process of the Convention, while a comprehensive assessment is contained in the report of CRIC 1 (ICCD/CRIC(1)/10). Furthermore, a synthesis by each subregion, required by decision 5/COP.3, paragraph 26, is contained in the reports of AHWG (2000) and of CRIC 1 (2002) and in document ICCD/CRIC(2)/3.

4. Article 23, paragraph 2(f) of the Convention requests the secretariat to prepare a report on the execution of its functions under this Convention. Together with the request for prioritizing and overall reporting on its programme of activities, contained in decision 2/COP.3, chapters II and III outline the main activities and thrust of the secretariat's programme of work.

II. SERVICES TO THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES

A. Conference of the Parties

5. In accordance with the mandates given by article 22, paragraph 2(a) and (b) and article 26 of the Convention, the secretariat has been servicing the COP and its subsidiary bodies by making appropriate logistical arrangements and transmitting reports for consideration by the Parties. During the period under review, two sessions of the COP and two intersessional sessions of its subsidiary bodies were convened.

6. In discharging these tasks, the secretariat relies upon the Conference Service Division of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), which provides translation of UNCCD documents into the six official United Nations languages as well as providing interpretation and general conference services to the official meetings of the Convention. The technical secretariat of the COP has been ensured with the assistance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, United Nations Secretariat, New York. Legal advice regarding the host country

agreements for sessions held outside the secretariat headquarters in Bonn is provided by the Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, New York.

7. In spite of an increased number of processed pages, release of documents by the secretariat is becoming faster. Documents for CRIC 1 were, on average, released by the secretariat two days before the deadline (at COP 5, they were released on average 37 days after the deadline). The average time for internal processing, that is, from final draft to advance copy was 6.4 days (COP 5: 7.3 days), with a minimum time of 1 day (COP 5: 1 day) and a maximum time of 27 days (COP 5: 22 days). The average time for processing by UNOG, that is, from advance copy to official document in all official United Nations languages was 37.9 days (COP 5: 37.0 days), with a minimum time of 16 days (COP 5: 7 days) and a maximum time of 73 days (COP 5: 98 days). This improvement is due to newly-introduced internal procedures for the processing of documents, which included the centralization of coordination and the on-site presence of external staff and consultants.

8. All reports prepared by the secretariat have been circulated to country Parties and observers through the official channels, and made available on the UNCCD Web site. Many reports were substantive in nature, providing analytical inputs for the various regional synthesis and preliminary analysis documents prepared by the secretariat.

9. The fourth session of the COP took place from 11 to 22 December 2000 in Bonn, Germany. 860 participants and 144 (out of 172) Parties to the Convention attended the session. The participation of delegates from least developed countries (LDCs) was funded through the Special Fund. Twelve countries not Parties to the Convention took part as observers, as well as 15 United Nations organizations and specialized agencies. The secretariat submitted 63 documents for this session, totaling 1,382 pages. The Conference adopted 23 decisions.

10. The fifth session of the COP took place from 1 to 12 October 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland. 870 participants and 138 (out of 176) country Parties to the Convention attended the session. Eight countries not Parties to the Convention were represented as observers, together with 13 United Nations organizations and specialized agencies. The secretariat prepared 46 documents for the session, totaling 1,106 pages. Twenty-five decisions were adopted by the Conference at this session.

11. Recognizing the strength of the non-governmental community and its role in lending its voice to, and being the interface for, grassroots communities in international forums, the secretariat has assisted the COP in effectively channelling the accreditation inflow from the non-governmental community. In this regard and to this date, more than 650 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been granted observer status to the COP. Additionally, in order to ensure the fulfilment of the concept of participatory process, the secretariat funded, through the Supplementary Fund, the participation at the sessions of the COP of an average of 35 representatives from the most relevant and active NGOs from country Parties.

12. The secretariat has also ensured the effective and active participation of NGOs in the open dialogue sessions during the COP. These sessions, officially included in the programme of work of the COP, provide a unique opportunity for NGOs to address the plenary meetings and discuss issues of particular importance for civil society. They constitute therefore an enhanced framework to promote effectively the bottom-up approach in the letter and spirit of the Convention.

B. Ad Hoc Working Group

13. The AHWG was established by decision 6/COP.3 to review and analyse in depth, at COP 4, reports submitted at its third and fourth sessions. The AHWG met during the fourth session of the COP in December 2000 and, following decision 1/COP.4, resumed its work at an intersessional session, which was held from 19 March to 6 April 2001 in Bonn, Germany. 111 (out of 174) country Parties and three United Nations organizations took part in this intersessional session. Fourteen documents were prepared by the secretariat, containing 398 pages.

C. Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

14. Following decision 2/COP.5, the first session of the CRIC was held from 11 to 22 November 2002 in Rome, Italy, attended by 420 participants, 149 country Parties (out of 185), six country observers, and eleven United Nations organizations and specialized agencies. Thirty-five documents were prepared with a total of 1,358 pages, including a comprehensive report to the COP with conclusions and recommendations, as prescribed by decision 1/COP.5. The secretariat further facilitated the organization of two segments of the session: thematic review and geographic review (regional wrap-up sessions) as well as a global interactive dialogue.

15. The presentation of specific case studies grouped along thematic topics, as decided by decision 1/COP.5, assisted the CRIC in its review and deliberations. The secretariat was facilitating this process by providing assistance to country Parties as well as technical inputs to the presentations made. The services leading to the convening of the CRIC implied a considerable amount of preparatory work (totalling six months) for the secretariat, including the compilation, synthesis and preliminary analysis of reports received from country Parties, subregional, intergovernmental and United Nations organizations, as well as the organization of regional meetings preparatory to CRIC 1.

D. Committee on Science and Technology

16. The Committee on Science and Technology (CST) met in conjunction with the ordinary sessions of the COP, that is, from 12 to 15 December 2000 in Bonn, Germany, for its fourth session, and from 2 to 5 October 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland, for its fifth session. At both sessions, the CST submitted a number of recommendations to the COP which subsequently adopted nine decisions at COP 4, and ten at COP 5.

17. Since the third session of the COP, the secretariat has serviced the CST to secure due follow-up on the decisions taken by the COP. Various activities have been undertaken by the secretariat in supporting the CST programme of work, including the facilitation of meetings of ad hoc panels and Group of Experts (GoE) as well as of the CST Bureau during the past four years.

18. Detailed information on activities relating to survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies, traditional knowledge and roster of independent experts, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST (activities relating to the GoE), and promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies, including follow-up of the Dryland Degradation Assessment (LADA) and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), can be found on the UNCCD Internet Web site at <http://www.unccd.int>. Activities relating to benchmarks and indicators as well as to early warning systems are described in section B of chapter V.

19. In accordance with decision 17/COP.5, the GoE was established, composed of 25 members. The GoE reviewed its programme of work, identified its tasks, and developed its work plan for 2002-2006. The central theme of the work programme is land degradation and land use.

20. In response to the request by the COP, the CST and the secretariat continue to follow closely the activities of the LADA and MA, including participation in meetings of the Technical Advisory Group and Steering Committee. The CST Bureau members and the secretariat also liaise with other relevant conventions and relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies, strengthening and promoting relationships.

III. POLICY ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING

A. Institutional liaison and coordination

21. The secretariat has actively promoted the Convention in those countries not yet Parties to the UNCCD. To date, 186 countries and the European Community (as compared to 158 countries and the European Community at the time of COP 3 in 1999) have ratified the Convention. This large number of ratifications represents a worldwide commitment towards an enabling environment to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. The secretariat also continued to promote the Convention through a global campaign, which has led to improved awareness of UNCCD goals and objectives.

22. A major focus of the secretariat's activities during the period under review has been the assistance provided upon request by affected developing countries in their efforts to fulfil their obligations under the Convention, in particular those aimed at strengthening capacities for preparing national, subregional and regional action programmes (NAPs, SRAPs and RAPs) under the UNCCD.

23. Likewise, the secretariat has engaged in policy advocacy and information exchange with all stakeholders. The potential of the UNCCD to contribute to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular that of halving the number of people living in poverty by 2015, has been recognized by the international community. In this regard, particular attention has been given to the integration of UNCCD action programmes into sustainable development frameworks, policies and programmes.

24. As requested by decision 8/COP.5, the secretariat has been actively involved in the work of the Preparatory Committee to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). A series of meetings has been organized by the secretariat prior to WSSD, including the Third High-Level Forum on Cooperation Between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean in the Framework of the UNCCD (Caracas, Venezuela, February 2002) and the Forum on the Implementation of the UNCCD Preparatory to WSSD (Praia, Cape Verde, March 2002). A panel of eminent personalities was established in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Its main topic was the nexus between poverty and environment in the context of implementation of the UNCCD. The outcomes of these activities were transmitted to the WSSD through its preparatory committees.

25. Outcomes of WSSD relevant to the UNCCD are presented in ICCD/COP(6)/5. The most important was the Summit's call on the Second Assembly of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to take action on designating land degradation (desertification and deforestation) as a focal area of the GEF, and to consider making the GEF a financial mechanism of the Convention. The GEF Assembly, in Beijing, China, in October 2002, concurred with the call of the WSSD. It also considered elements on an Operational Programme (OP) on sustainable land management. The secretariat provided its input to the draft OP. It advocated additional funding from the GEF to add crucial momentum to the implementation processes which have been substantially delayed because of the lack of predictable financial resources. Additional information regarding the financing of Convention implementation, including information on activities of the GEF, is available in ICCD/CRIC(2)/6.

26. It is expected that the COP at its sixth session will consider, among other things, the Convention's financial mechanism and take action on the offer made by the Assembly of the GEF to have the Facility serve as a financial mechanism of the Convention.

27. Given the nature of the UNCCD, which should be implemented through a coalition of various stakeholders, the demands for coordination and liaison have increased. In the period under review, the secretariat responded to the invitation of affected country Parties regarding the development of relevant international or regional initiatives. The secretariat was requested to promote relevant policies and to provide the necessary framework for activities towards combating desertification in the framework of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In this regard, the secretariat, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), facilitated consultative meetings in 2002, which provided representatives of African countries and subregional organizations with an opportunity to review the process for formulation of proposals to combat desertification in the context of NEPAD. The overall objective of these consultations was to review and finalize the project proposals identified to combat desertification, taking fully into account the SRAPs and RAPs under the UNCCD. The secretariat continues to assist the African countries in finalizing the action plan for the NEPAD Environment Initiative, which emphasizes that the effort to combat desertification is a critical component in the eradication of poverty in the vast majority of African countries.

28. In addition to institutional liaison with global international organizations and initiatives, working relationships were also established and deepened with those working at the regional level. Memoranda of understanding (MoU) were signed with a number of institutions, with a view to

raising the response level for land degradation and desertification in these institutions and to spelling out modalities for concrete cooperation. Intensive liaison is also pursued with United Nations institutions, such as the World Bank, regional development banks and relevant regional and subregional institutions.

29. One of the results of the ongoing advocacy efforts of the secretariat and the related collaboration with these institutions is the fact that the issue of combating desertification has become more and more prominent in their agendas and work programmes.

30. Finally, the secretariat has developed relationships with political authorities, the academic community, parliamentary officials and the private sector within the host country, and thus mobilized various forms of involvement in, and sponsorship of, UNCCD activities.

B. Synergies and coalition building

31. In accordance with article 8 and article 22, paragraph 2(i) of the Convention, and relevant decisions of the COP, including decision 7/COP.5, and as detailed in ICCD/COP(6)/4, the secretariat has adopted a strategy towards promotion and strengthening of synergies among the conventions and other relevant organizations which relies on four main pillars: strengthening institutional linkages, testing operational options, including capacity-building initiatives, developing common policies and strategies, and supporting country-driven initiatives.

32. In order to put this strategy into operation, the secretariat has been involved in the development of, *inter alia*, joint programmes of work and the holding of joint workshops and consultative forums. MoU have also been signed with other environmental conventions and relevant United Nations and other organizations, outlining areas of possible collaboration.

33. Various regional, subregional and national workshops on synergies between multilateral environmental agreements have been facilitated by the secretariat worldwide. The major conclusion of these workshops was that capacity building is crucial in order to implement these conventions in a synergistic way at the local level, where efforts should focus on supporting integrative approaches.

34. At the institutional level, the three Rio conventions' secretariats have established a joint liaison group in order to foster closer collaboration among them. The representatives of the UNCCD secretariat, together with the chairpersons of subsidiary bodies of the UNCCD COP, have participated actively in this endeavour in order to identify more specific avenues of collaboration.

35. The promotion of linkages between focal points of the UNCCD and those of other conventions, as well as strengthened coordination with civil society at local level, contribute to the development of a synergistic approach at national levels, and this applies not only to global conventions, but also to regional or thematic conventions such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (in particular its MEDWET programme), the Convention on Migratory Species, the Barcelona Convention, the Aarhus Convention, and others.

C. Awareness raising and networking

36. Broad public information activities have strengthened the relationships with the secretariats of other relevant conventions, particularly the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and with international financial institutions, other intergovernmental organizations, governments, academia and the private sector. It has also raised awareness of the public and key actors of the interrelationships with other social and environmental issues and of the importance of combating desertification.

37. To reach out better to the media, and to follow up coverage of UNCCD-related topics, a media kit has been distributed at press conferences. Press coverage on matters relating to the Convention is regularly reviewed, stored in a database and posted on the UNCCD Web site.

38. In order to provide up-to-date and accurate information to the public at the global and local levels, the UNCCD information kits, which were initially conceived as a pilot project, received very positive feedback and were subsequently updated, translated and reprinted in 1999, 2002 and 2003 in all six official United Nations languages. Furthermore, and in order to sensitize children on the problem of desertification, a teacher's kit was produced in English, French and Spanish and distributed to selected schools in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

39. To enhance the visibility of the Convention and to reach out to a wider public at events and conferences, UNCCD exhibition panels were produced and displayed. In addition, custom-tailored leaflets, brochures and booklets were produced and distributed together with the UNCCD newsletters and kits to targeted groups at major international conferences, including WSSD, in order to achieve a global outreach.

40. A collection of best practices from local communities was published to support the Convention's effectiveness, to strengthen the involvement of NGOs, and to encourage local communities to combat desertification. The establishment of an electronic media database, a photographic database and a database for UNCCD publications were also completed. The regular updating of the UNCCD Web page also improves and increases the availability of public information materials.

41. Worldwide organization and celebration of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought on 17 June each year serves as a useful tool to encourage a dialogue on combating desertification worldwide. In addition, a joint exhibition has been organized and a joint calendar produced with the secretariats of the UNFCCC and CBD with support from governments, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector.

42. By providing information to national focal points on specific aspects of the Convention's implementation process and related decisions, the regional facilitation units are contributing to awareness raising at the national, subregional and regional levels. The same applies to the NGOs accredited, or seeking accreditation, to the UNCCD.

43. Moreover, in order to facilitate and strengthen the participation of civil society in the UNCCD process at all levels and to reinforce the capacity of NGOs in the policy and advocacy fields, the secretariat has organized NGO meetings at the subregional, regional and global levels. These meetings have allowed for an extensive exchange of information and a strengthening of relations and linkages between individual NGOs and the different networks active in the UNCCD process, including RIOD (International NGO Network on Desertification) and Djomga 21, as well as with different intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies and country Parties.

44. The UNCCD secretariat has set up a library with a catalogued collection of books, reports, proceedings and audiovisual material on the topics addressed by the Convention. The entire catalogue, which will very soon be accessible through the UNCCD Web site, now includes more than 5,000 items of information material in the six United Nations official languages.

45. The library provides up-to-date information on the Convention to academia and to the public at large, via a subscription database search. Furthermore, it responds to the information requirements of the secretariat and the Parties, as well as of that of other national, international, governmental and non-governmental bodies.

D. Advisory support in policy and legislative matters

46. One of the main duties of the secretariat regarding institutional and procedural matters of the COP and its subsidiary bodies is providing legal advice and advisory support on policy issues. In preparation for the fourth and fifth sessions of the COP, legal substantive reports were produced on matters pertaining to outstanding issues such as the annexes on conciliation and arbitration procedures for the settlement of disputes, and the resolution of questions on the implementation of the Convention. The secretariat also assisted the Parties and the COP Bureau in matters concerning procedures and institutional mechanisms to review the implementation of the Convention, which led to the establishment of subsidiary bodies to the Convention such as the AHWG and the CRIC. During the first session of the CRIC, the secretariat extended the same advice on procedures and other institutional matters to the CRIC Bureau and its Chairperson.

47. During the period under review, legal assistance was provided to the Parties in interpreting the provisions of the Convention, advising on legal aspects of substantive documentation and assisting elected officers by advising on procedures and processes. This also entailed liaising with the United Nation Office of Legal Affairs and with legal officers of other environmental agencies and other specialized agencies on legal matters.

48. Legal and policy advice was provided on matters relating to the headquarters agreements and host country agreements for hosting meetings away from Bonn.

IV. FACILITATION OF PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES AND PROGRESS MADE BY AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

A. Catalytic support to action programmes and interregional activities

49. The secretariat assisted affected developing country Parties in reporting on their efforts to alleviate the problems associated with land degradation, deforestation, reduced water availability and inadequate agricultural and forestry practices, as well as with poverty, notably in the context of the CRIC. New legal frameworks and policies have been under consideration by some country Parties, aimed at reducing poverty through relevant desertification programmes and projects.

50. The secretariat provided support to affected developing country Parties in mainstreaming NAPs into their development plans and strategies, building partnerships and implementing the Convention in a synergistic manner. For instance, it organized regional workshops with the Africa, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) secretariat in Apia, Samoa, in Kingston, Jamaica, in Cotonou, Benin and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2001. It was underscored that incentive measures are needed in most of developing countries to promote sustainable natural resources management. In addition, it was emphasized that an increased level of benefits could be achieved through addressing biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation through local actions.

51. The secretariat, through its regional facilitation units, has maintained and developed regular contact with the officially designated UNCCD national focal points, the subregional institutions coordinating the SRAP processes, and the institutional focal points in charge of regional-level activities. Through this assistance by the secretariat, the constant flow of information amongst country Parties and their institutions has been improved, and information of relevance for the UNCCD process at all levels is being shared with the country Parties. The regional facilitation units have also helped in establishing contacts between affected country Parties and their development partners and research institutions, with the support of the regional coordination units.

52. In Africa, most of the countries have been supported technically and/or financially in the process of NAP formulation and adoption, in close collaboration with the respective United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) country offices, bilateral partners ("chefs de file") and the Global Mechanism. To date, 29 countries have adopted their NAPs, as compared to 15 in 2000. Another six countries are planning to complete the NAP preparation process before the end of 2003. In some countries, the UNCCD secretariat, UNDP and other partners are supporting pilot activities within the NAPs, such as the formulation and implementation of national youth environment programmes. At subregional level, four SRAPs (Western, Eastern and Southern Africa, the Maghreb) have been finalized and are in the implementation phase. The secretariat, together with its international and bilateral partners, is supporting a number of transboundary pilot projects on environmental resources management at local level within the SRAPs. It is also, together with the Global Mechanism, in the process of supporting the formulation of a SRAP in the fifth subregion (Central Africa). At regional level, four out of six thematic programme networks (TPNs) have been launched as part of the RAP. The fifth TPN on the promotion of new and renewable sources of energy is planned to be launched in October 2003.

53. In Asia, the secretariat, together with the Global Mechanism and other partners, has supported the organization of national workshops for formulating NAPs. Seventeen NAPs have been adopted so far (as compared to eight in 2000). National awareness seminars have been held in many countries. These activities have helped countries to mainstream the activities to combat desertification, mitigate drought and promote sustainable land management into their policy agendas. With regard to the SRAPs, one has been adopted (West Asia), whereas in other subregions joint activities have been undertaken or are considered in the form of SRAPs or other subregional cooperation activities. Four TPNs have been launched and are being implemented as part of the Asia RAP. It is planned that the fifth TPN on drought mitigation will be launched in July 2003.

54. In accordance with decision 8/COP.4, the implementation of the Convention in the Latin American and Caribbean country Parties (LAC) is classified into four categories: (i) seven country Parties which have already formulated their NAP and are in an implementation phase, requiring financial support (same number as in 2000), (ii) country Parties currently formulating their NAPs, requiring additional financial and technical support, (iii) country Parties in an initial stage and in need of financial/technical support to mobilize institutions and actors, (iv) country Parties still in the process of raising awareness of the UNCCD at the national level. The SRAP processes have been initiated in all subregions. Two SRAPs (Puña and Chaco) have been fully developed and three additional SRAPs, in the Caribbean, in Hispaniola Island and in Mesoamerica, are under preparation. The RAP was approved in 1997 and will be assessed in 2003-2004 before the implementation of its second phase in 2004-2009. The LAC region is currently establishing a network on benchmarks and indicators, following the guidelines established by the CST and workshops organized at the subregional level.

55. Advice and, in some cases, financial assistance provided by the secretariat to the national focal points in affected Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties has facilitated the process of NAP preparation and adoption. Currently, seven countries from the Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern Europe are implementing their NAPs (as compared to three in 2000). The secretariat has also facilitated the development of the subregional cooperation framework of Annex IV (Northern Mediterranean) country Parties, which resulted in the adoption of terms of reference of a SRAP. The secretariat was also requested to facilitate the launch of the regional process for all countries of Annex IV. A regional platform for exchange of information and dialogue was created for Northern Mediterranean countries. Following the adoption of Annex V, the process of preparing a framework document aimed at developing regional cooperation between Central and Eastern European countries was initiated and is being facilitated by the secretariat. Further to requests from country Parties of Annexes IV and V, the secretariat is planning to launch the development of interregional activities between these two Annexes.

56. At the interregional level, the organization of a number of meetings between African and Latin American and Caribbean, as well as between African and Asian country Parties, has been supported by the secretariat. Exchange of experience and building of partnerships between African and Latin American and Caribbean country Parties were initiated and recognized by the Third High Level Forum on Cooperation Between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean in the Framework of the UNCCD, held in Caracas, Venezuela, in February 2002. In order to stimulate interregional cooperation between Africa and Asia, in particular in the fields of agroforestry and

soil conservation, the fourth Africa-Asia Forum on Combating Desertification was organized in Cotonou, Benin, in June 2003. In addition, the secretariat provided advice and technical support to the development of interregional activities on land degradation and desertification in the Mediterranean Basin.

B. Support to institutional capacity building

57. In the last four years, the secretariat has strengthened collaboration with other relevant institutions in providing support to the process of institutional capacity building, with significant progress, given the limited amount of funding available. CRIC 1 confirmed that a majority of affected country Parties undertook to incorporate the implementation of the Convention into existing environmental frameworks at the national level and/or sought synergistic approaches to implementation of action programmes. Countries reported to the CRIC that linkages between line ministries had been established, and that efforts had been made to integrate civil society into the programming and implementation process of NAPs. However, it was also reported that institutional capacity building is an ongoing process which needs continuous assessment and/or amendment through the review process, as well as appropriate funding to implement these measures. The secretariat contributed to related activities and provided support to affected countries in this respect.

58. National focal points have participated in workshops and training on specific issues such as the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, GEF procedures, synergies between conventions, NEPAD and thematic networks, which were organized with the support of the secretariat. In addition, the annual regional meetings of UNCCD focal points, organized by the regional facilitation units jointly with the respective host governments, aim to support the country Parties to prepare effectively for sessions of the COP and of the CRIC. Assistance has also been provided to country Parties in the preparation of their first and second series of national reports.

59. Country Parties, having considered the need for capacity strengthening, particularly with regard to the tools to prepare suitable projects that would attract funding, have requested the secretariat to facilitate tailor-made capacity building training on project proposal formulation. Responding to this request, the secretariat, in collaboration with the GEF secretariat and representatives of its implementing agencies, has facilitated the training of representatives from Africa and Asia on preparation of projects eligible for GEF funding. In addition, the government of Benin, in collaboration with the secretariat, organized a subregional workshop on GEF procedures in the context of implementation of the UNCCD for West African country Parties which have adopted their NAP. The meeting was held in Parakou, Benin, in April 2003.

60. Additionally, the bottom-up approach provides country Parties with the opportunity to empower civil society, community-based organizations, NGOs and women's associations to take part in the consultation on, and preparation and implementation of, action programmes, as well as in the formulation and implementation of projects at the local level. The secretariat has encouraged and supported a number of country Parties in this exercise.

61. The full functioning of national coordinating bodies (NCBs) was deemed of paramount importance. The lack of an effective funding mechanism addressing desertification and drought has weakened the process of institutional capacity building at the national level and resulted in the fact that NCBs have not always been able to place the formulation and implementation of

desertification/land degradation and drought policies higher on their national agendas. It has not always been possible to transfer resources, knowledge, technologies, and information to local users, which has inhibited the process of their institutional capacity building.

62. The new GEF focal area on land degradation would provide a positive stimulus to address this issue. Considering that more and more affected country Parties are finalizing the formulation phase of action programmes and are subsequently moving into the implementation phase, the need for appropriate support from the international community is becoming pressing.

C. Support to partnership building

63. The implementation of field-level activities remains a key concern of Parties, who invited the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to provide them with support, in accordance with their respective mandates. The formulation and implementation of NAPs reflects the political and macro-economic context of the affected country Parties. In some regions, a long-lasting economic and financial crisis and the structural adjustment processes threaten the implementation of sustainable development policies, particularly in the context of poverty reduction, desertification and drought. The secretariat and the Global Mechanism, through a joint work programme, have supported the formulation and implementation of action programmes by making use of voluntary contributions at their disposal.

64. In conformity with article 18 of the Regional Implementation Annex for Africa, the secretariat has been providing, upon request, advice on the organization of consultative arrangements for the establishment of partnership agreements. This has been done in close collaboration with the UNDP country offices and the Global Mechanism. So far, a few African countries have reported on successful partnership agreements, but further support needs to be provided.

65. In Asia, the secretariat, together with the Global Mechanism and the Asian Development Bank, assisted the Government of China in organizing the Coordination Meeting for Partnership Building and Resource Mobilization for UNCCD Implementation in China in June 2001. Mongolia and India organized the Technical Workshop on the Formulation of Field Projects for UNCCD NAP Implementation in December 2002 with the support of the secretariat while a similar meeting is planned in Tajikistan. These processes are also expected to facilitate partnership building.

66. The limited progress reported on implementation of the Convention in the LAC region can be ascribed to the scarcity of financial resources allocation in the region. There is a clear demand to move forward in the implementation of the Convention through NAP implementation. Only three countries have succeeded in building partnerships, with the assistance of the secretariat and other partners, such as the Global Mechanism and UNDP.

67. Similarly, the launch of the process of partnership building for developing countries under Annexes IV and V is being encouraged by the secretariat but, in spite of the growing number of requests received from country Parties of this region, the process has barely started due to a lack of enabling financial resources.

V. MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

A. National, subregional, and regional reports

68. The national reports were prepared by affected country Parties and submitted to the secretariat. Presentations based on these reports were made at the sessions of the AHWG and during respective regional meetings in preparation for CRIC 1. The secretariat provided financial, advisory and logistical support for this important activity.

69. In the context of the national reporting processes, NGOs were encouraged to take part in the preparation of reports and dissemination of relevant information by providing information to their national focal points on their activities in support of the preparation and implementation of action programmes under the Convention.

70. As a result of the continuous support provided to country Parties by the secretariat, the number of affected countries Parties that have submitted their national report on the implementation of the Convention has increased. In 2002, 48 African country Parties submitted their reports (42 in 1999), 44 Asian country Parties (37 in 2000), 33 Latin American and Caribbean country Parties (30 in 2000), and 17 Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties (10 in 2000).

71. In accordance with decision 8/COP.4 on enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention, the secretariat undertook to inform the Parties on the current state of implementation of the Convention, by preparing a report (ICCD/CRIC(2)/3) to be submitted to the COP at its sixth session.

72. The Africa facilitation unit is supporting four African countries in the elaboration of a country profile on desertification, with the objective of compiling a summary of baseline information on the state of desertification, implementation of the UNCCD and effectiveness of measures undertaken.

B. Committee on Science and Technology-related activities

73. Based on the methodological framework for benchmarks and impact indicators developed by the Ad Hoc Panel, which acted as a steering committee to the open-ended informal consultative process on benchmarks and indicators, methodologies for a set of 17 indicators and 51 evaluation parameters to monitor the UNCCD implementation process were made available to the Parties.

74. The COP endorsed this methodological framework and invited Parties to initiate testing of the impact indicators and the practicality of using these indicators in their national reporting. This has been reflected in some national reports.

75. The secretariat participated in the creation and institutionalization of a benchmarks and indicators project in the LAC region which is supported by the Inter American Development Bank.

76. Two ad hoc panels on early warning systems (EWS) were appointed by the COP. Their reports and recommendations have been adopted by the COP. The reports, together with the background papers, will be published and disseminated at the sixth session of the COP.

C. Support to evaluation process

77. The secretariat facilitated the external evaluation of the Global Mechanism initiated by the President of COP 5 in response to decision 9/COP.3. The report on the evaluation (ICCD/CRIC(2)/5) will be submitted to the COP at its sixth session.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

78. During the period under review, the secretariat has responded to the decisions of the COP in providing the required support to country Parties. Positive developments leading to progress in the implementation of the Convention have been accomplished at all levels. Parties have decided to institutionalize the review of the implementation of the Convention by establishing a standing subsidiary body (CRIC) to assist the COP in this respect. Important results for the Convention were achieved through policy advocacy, notably in the context of WSSD and the GEF. Full implementation of the joint work programme with the Global Mechanism and closer collaboration with relevant institutions will improve services delivered to Parties at regional, subregional and national levels. However, in the context of decision 8/COP.4 and its annex containing the Declaration on the commitments to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention, the challenge ahead to meet the expectations and targets of the Parties remains considerable.

79. The COP may wish:

(a) To provide further guidance, as appropriate, to the secretariat in the area of servicing the COP and its subsidiary bodies, policy advocacy and awareness raising, facilitation of priority implementation processes and support to monitoring and assessment, with particular reference to decision 8/COP.4 and the targets defined therein;

(b) To request the secretariat to ensure continuous support to affected country Parties and timely delivery of services required by them as well as the development of a common awareness-raising and information strategy, including through pursuing the development of a two-year joint work programme with the Global Mechanism;

(c) To invite the secretariat, notably in the context of the new operational programme of the GEF on sustainable land management, to cooperate with the secretariats of the UNFCCC and CBD as well as the GEF, in order to promote the synergistic potential of the UNCCD instruments for integrated natural resources management through facilitation of country-driven multi-funded initiatives;

(d) To invite the secretariat further to intensify its effort in support of the mainstreaming of CST-related activities into the Convention's programming instruments.

Annex**NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMME FORMULATION PROCESS** (as at July 2003)

	Total number	Africa	Asia	Latin America and the Caribbean	Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe and other affected country Parties
Partnership agreements have been concluded and/or are being initiated	13	6	3	3	1
NAP implementation has started with or without the conclusion of partnership agreements	56	29	13	7	7
NAP officially adopted	60	29	17	7	7
Final draft of a NAP exists	11	1	1	8	1
Elaboration of a draft NAP is underway	15	5	1	5	4
Basic guidelines for a NAP have been established	7	0	2	4	1
Process has only been initiated	18	0	8	5	5
Process has not yet started	55	18	19	4	14
