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**CONSIDERATION OF WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPROVING PROCEDURES FOR
COMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION, AS WELL AS THE QUALITY AND
FORMAT OF REPORTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE CONFERENCE
OF THE PARTIES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) will at its third session consider ways and means of improving procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties (COP). In addressing these matters, particular reference is made to the provisions of the Convention on communication of information, the pertinent decisions of the COP, the recommendations made by the subsidiary bodies, and the information provided by the Parties and observers in the course of the reporting processes so far.

The way the Parties fulfil their reporting obligations under the Convention is directly linked to the results in, and achievement of the objectives of, the implementation of the Convention. Procedures for communication of information, as input to the process of the review of the implementation of the Convention, need to be adjusted to the new realities in the implementation of the Convention, which has shifted its focus from institution building (in which building of implementation mechanisms and basic obligations were the main interest) to putting into practice action programmes (in which the results of implementation and additional specific obligations have become dominant).

This document reviews the relevant provisions regarding procedures for communication of information, systematizing them according to the main actors involved in these procedures, the ways these procedures are put in place, as well as topics of, and time cycle for, communication of information. It also addresses various aspects relevant to the preparation of reports, such as financial and technical support, capacity and involvement of stakeholders/participatory approach. Finally, it this document provides some conclusions and recommendations regarding possibilities for improving the quality and format of reports and procedures for communication of information that the CRIC and subsequently the COP might wish to consider in this respect.

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Reporting is the basis for an effective assessment of the implementation of the Convention and for taking informed decisions on how to steer the process under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) towards its ultimate goals. Reports by Parties and observers are the backbone of the review of the implementation of the Convention. In addition, the Convention pays particular attention to parallel processes and other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), as well as to cooperation with international organizations. A number of provisions are contained in the Convention itself and in relevant decisions of the COP on communication of information on these matters. Circulation of information is, in general, perceived in the UNCCD process as a means to facilitate experience-sharing and to provide Parties with additional information on how better to tackle desertification and desertification-related effects.

2. One of the key obligations of Parties and observers to the Convention is to communicate to the COP, for consideration at its ordinary sessions, reports on the measures which have been taken towards the implementation of the Convention. The COP, in turn, is charged with promoting and facilitating the exchange of information on measures adopted by the Parties, determining the format of such reports and timetable for their submission, reviewing them and making recommendations on them.¹

3. Parties are obliged to provide specific information according to their status. Affected country Parties are asked to provide a description of the strategies established pursuant to article 5 of the Convention and any relevant information on their implementation.² Affected country Parties which implement action programmes are asked to provide a detailed description of the programmes and of their implementation.³ In addition to this, any group of affected country Parties may make a joint communication on measures taken at the subregional and/or regional levels in the framework of action programmes.⁴ Conversely, developed country Parties should report on measures taken to assist in the preparation and implementation of action programmes, including information on the financial resources they have provided, or are providing, under the Convention.⁵

4. Building upon article 26 of the Convention, the COP at its first session adopted the procedures for communication of information.⁶ Further specifications as to the format, structure and content of reports, as well as the timetable for their submission, are also contained in this decision. The secretariat was entrusted with the tasks of compiling the summaries and of preparing syntheses of the reports and placing them in the public domain.

5. In light of the aforementioned procedures for communication of information, the COP at its third session initiated the review of the implementation of the Convention, with no specific mechanisms or procedures to assist it in this task. At that time, reports submitted by affected African country Parties and by subregional and regional organizations in Africa, by developed country Parties and United Nations organizations and other intergovernmental

¹ Convention text, article 22, paragraph 2 (b).

² Ibid, article 26, paragraph 2.

³ Ibid, article 26, paragraph 3.

⁴ Ibid, article 26, paragraph 4.

⁵ Ibid, article 26, paragraph 5.

⁶ Decision 11/COP.1.

(IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on their support to the implementation of action programmes in Africa were taken up through panel discussions, with no specific guidance on how to conduct the review of reports.

6. In order to compensate for this shortcoming, the COP requested the secretariat⁷ to provide for the forthcoming sessions of the COP a synthesis by each subregion, with the aim of formulating a comparative document on the progress made by affected country Parties in the implementation of the Convention.⁸

7. The first review attempt was considered unsatisfactory, and at the same session the COP established⁹ an open-ended temporary subsidiary body, the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG). The AHWG was entrusted with the task of reviewing and analysing in depth, at COP 4, reports submitted to COP 3 and those to be submitted to COP 4 in order to draw conclusions and propose concrete recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention, again with no specific guidance as to how to conduct this review. It was only at its fourth session that the COP decided on the procedures for reviewing reports.¹⁰ The AHWG reviewed and analysed reports by adopting thematic approaches based on the topics selected by the COP. The AHWG submitted an interim report to COP 4,¹¹ containing suggestions on key thematic topics along which the review of implementation could be conducted, and a comprehensive report on its conclusions together with concrete recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention for consideration at COP 5.

8. During this adaptation process, which involved a complete cycle of reporting (Africa and regions other than Africa), no major changes were made to the format of reports and to procedures for communication of information.

9. It was at its fourth session, by adopting the Declaration on the commitments to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention,¹² that the COP decided to give due consideration to the provisions of this Declaration in the framework of the regular review of the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, it invited Parties to include in their reports appropriate information relating to the enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention. This also resulted in an additional request to the secretariat to compile, synthesize and submit such information through a separate report to each COP during this decade, starting in 2003.

10. It was also at COP 4, following input from the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), that the basic format of national reports was first modified. The COP invited Parties to develop a minimum set of impact indicators, with a view to selecting a common set of basic indicators at a later stage, and to include in their national reports information on progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the CST.¹³ The COP requested the secretariat to revise the *Help Guide*, which was based on provisions contained in decision

⁷ Decision 5/COP.3.

⁸ These reports are contained in ICCD/COP(4)/3, ICCD/COP(5)/3 and ICCD/CRIC(2)/2.

⁹ Decision 6/COP.3.

¹⁰ Decision 1/COP.4.

¹¹ Included as an annex to decision 2/COP.4.

¹² Included in decision 8/COP.4.

¹³ Decision 10/COP.4.

11/COP.1, with the aim of providing guidance to Parties as to how better to reflect in their national reports the activities of scientific and technical communities and institutions.

11. At its fifth session, the COP established a fully-fledged subsidiary body (the CRIC) to assist it in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention, and adopted its terms of reference.¹⁴ Concerning the subject and the timing of the review, the COP decided that the first session of the CRIC would take up updates to reports already available and/or new reports from all regions. After COP 6, the review would be conducted in accordance with the timetable outlined in paragraphs 13 to 15 of decision 11/COP.1 which implies the alternation of Africa and other regions in the reporting process. The review should focus on specific thematic topics identified by the Parties. The COP further requested the secretariat to compile, synthesize and provide a preliminary analysis of the reports submitted by Parties and observers and the reports on regional inputs, according to thematic priorities identified by the Parties, for submission to the CRIC. The report of the CRIC would be submitted to the COP for its consideration and for any decision the COP might wish to take on the implementation of the Convention. The COP also established the principle of facilitating the review by its newly-established subsidiary body through an intermediate review process to be conducted at regional level, prior to CRIC sessions. As a result of this, additional documentation needs to be prepared by the secretariat to reflect such regional input to complement basic information provided at national level.

12. The format of national reports went through an adaptation process to comply with the revised procedures and requirements of the implementation review established by decision 1/COP.5. Additionally, at COP 5 the Parties recognized the need to adjust their national reporting to the evolving needs of the implementation process, notably with respect to the activities relating to the CST and the involvement of civil society, and therefore requested the secretariat to adjust the *Help Guide* accordingly,¹⁵ *inter alia*, by including the revisions proposed by the CST.¹⁶ At its sixth session, the COP requested the secretariat, together with its partner agencies and in close collaboration with the CST, to revise again the *Help Guide* where appropriate, to include indicators on, *inter alia*, the participation of women and youth, as well as social indicators,¹⁷ and to allow the country Parties to integrate fully into their reports the thematic areas specified in decision 8/COP.4, working towards harmonizing the reporting system with those of other MEAs.¹⁸

13. It has to be noted that the above-mentioned revisions were made primarily to the format and content of reports by affected and, to a lesser extent, developed country Parties. Reports from the observers continued to be prepared on the basis of a few elements/specifications provided in decision 11/COP.1.

¹⁴ Decision 1/COP.5.

¹⁵ Decision 2/COP.5.

¹⁶ Decision 10/COP.5.

¹⁷ Decision 1/COP.6.

¹⁸ Decision 4/COP.6.

II. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

14. The demand for information was analysed through a review of the various provisions of the Convention, the deliberations made by the COP and the recommendations of its subsidiary bodies. In this exercise, the focus was given to basic obligations and further specific requests to Parties and observers to report to the COP, aiming at providing information in view of the review of the implementation of the Convention, while provisions on circulation of information (establishment of a global network of institutions, systematic observation of land degradation, and like) were not considered.

15. The first part of the analytical work undertaken by the secretariat focused on the regional reporting processes, in order to explore possible ways and means of improving the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the COP. The following sources of information were considered:

- The recommendations made by the subsidiary bodies (CRIC/AHWG, CST)¹⁹ and decisions taken by the COP further to these recommendations;
- The information provided by the Parties and observers in the course of the reporting processes thus far.

16. A detailed analysis was conducted according to:

- (a) The originator of information [Parties (affected and developed), United Nations and other IGOs and NGOs, financial institutions, the secretariat, the Global Mechanism (GM)];
- (b) The intended recipient of the information (COP, CRIC, CST);
- (c) The topic of information (CST-related matters, specific reporting requests made to the Parties and organizations, global issues, financing of the Convention);
- (d) The ways in which the information is communicated (national/subregional reports, other submissions by Parties and observers, information compiled by the secretariat, solicited input requested by the COP from the CST and the GM, and so on);
- (e) The time cycle for communicating the information (as defined by 11/COP.1, as well as all other decisions which give time frames for communication of other information).

17. The following matters pertaining to reports were analysed in detail:

1. Guidelines to assist Parties in the reporting process and their revisions (*Help Guides/Explanatory Notes*);
2. Basic content of reports and additional requests for information (country profiles);
3. Provision of information and format/quality of reports;
4. Financial and technical support provided to affected developing country Parties;

¹⁹ Interim (decision 2/COP.4, as contained in ICCD/COP(4)/11/Add.1) and final (ICCD/COP(4)/AHWG/6, whose conclusions and recommendations are also attached to decision 3/COP.5, as contained in ICCD/COP(5)/11/Add.1) reports of the AHWG, as well as the report of the CRIC on its first session (ICCD/CRIC(1)/10). The input of the CST was provided through draft decisions endorsed by the COP, in particular decisions 10/COP.4 and 10/COP.5 on review and implementation of scientific and technological aspects of national reports (as contained in ICCD/COP(4)/11/Add.1 and ICCD/COP(5)/11/Add.1 respectively).

5. Development of capacity to prepare and formulate reports;
6. Involvement of stakeholders and participatory approach in reporting.

18. Whenever relevant, the outcome of such analysis is reported in chapters III to VII of this document.

III. ANALYSIS CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO THE ORIGINATOR OF INFORMATION

A. Reports from country Parties

19. Decision 11/COP.1 confirms the general obligation of the Parties to report to the COP, through the secretariat, on measures taken towards the implementation of the Convention. Since the entry into force of the UNCCD, three reporting processes have taken place. Country Parties have adhered to the procedure for communication of information and have submitted their reports to the COP and its subsidiary bodies, as follows:

	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of reports by affected country Parties</i>	<i>Number of reports by developed country Parties, IGOs and UN organizations</i>	<i>Body</i>
1 st reporting process	Africa	1999	42	34	Panel discussion at COP 3
	Regions other than Africa	2000	73	26	COP 4 through AHWG
2 nd reporting process	All regions	2002	148	41	COP 6 through CRIC 1
3 rd reporting process	Africa	2004 - 2005	48*	32*	COP 7 through CRIC 3

* At the time of preparation of this document.

1. Guidelines to assist Parties in the reporting process

20. In preparation for the first reporting cycle, the secretariat undertook to prepare a *Help Guide*²⁰ to be used by affected country Parties in compiling their national reports. The *Help Guide* was designed to provide the national focal points (NFPs), as well as others involved in the process, with guidelines to assist them in the collection, compilation, analysis and presentation of data and information. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Sahara and the Sahel Observatory (OSS) and experts from the African subregional organizations cooperated in preparing the first *Help Guide*.

21. The *Help Guide* contains background information and explanation of the procedures for communication of information and review of implementation of the Convention, a proposed methodology and possible process to follow, as well as an outline and explanation of the specific guidelines provided by decision 11/COP.1. The *Help Guide* was expected to

²⁰ ICCD/COP(3)/INF.3.

be adapted by the national coordinating bodies (NCBs) to the particularities and requirements of each national context.

22. The *Help Guide* was adopted at COP 3. This being a first experience, it was expected that country Parties would have suggested adjustments to the different questions offered in the *Help Guide*, based on experience gained during the preparation of national reports in accordance with the methodology proposed.

23. In preparation for the second reporting process, the secretariat prepared, at the request of the Parties,²¹ revised separate versions of the *Help Guide* for different regional implementation annexes of the Convention.²² An *Explanatory Note* was added to each of these *Help Guides*, and one was also prepared for developed country Parties.²³ These documents reflected mainly the adjustments brought about by the establishment of new procedures and mechanisms for the review of the implementation of the Convention.²⁴ The format of national reports should follow the headings of decision 11/COP.1, as well as a number of key thematic topics defined in decision 1/COP.5. Country Parties that had not submitted a national report before were expected to produce a full report, using the updated *Help Guide*. Joint (subregional and regional) reports were still expected to provide information on the seven key thematic topics identified in decision 1/COP.5, where and when appropriate.

24. Further adjustments to the *Help Guide* were undertaken in response to other relevant COP decisions. Parties were invited to consider the report of the AHWG and to highlight the steps taken and progress made in order to follow up on recommendations made, particularly with respect to the implementation of the UNCCD at the local level, as well as the negotiation and conclusion of partnership agreements based on national, subregional and regional action programmes,²⁵ and also to include new indicators, evaluation parameters and other elements entitled: “Strategies and priorities established within the framework of sustainable development plans and/or policies”, as contained in document ICCD/COP(5)/CST/5.²⁶

25. The secretariat proposed at COP 3²⁷ and COP 4 a possible structure for the reports of developed country Parties. Similar provisions as for affected country Parties were made regarding focusing, where and when appropriate, on the key thematic issues identified in decision 1/COP.5, as well as on inclusion of CST-related indicators.

26. The first part of the third reporting process is being undertaken within the context of CRIC 3 and COP 7. Submissions from the Parties are again expected to comply with the format and content of reports as outlined in decision 11/COP.1. Affected African country Parties were requested to provide to the secretariat an update of their previous reports in the light of the COP 6 decisions. The following adjustments were made to the reporting format:²⁸

(a) additional indicators on, *inter alia*, the participation of women and youth, as well as social

²¹ Decisions 8/COP.4, 10/COP.4, 1/COP.5, 2/COP.5, 10/COP.5.

²² ICCD/CRIC(1)/INF.4, INF.5, INF.6 and INF.7, respectively.

²³ ICCD/CRIC(1)/INF.8.

²⁴ Decision 1/COP.5.

²⁵ Decision 3/COP.5.

²⁶ Decision 10/COP.5.

²⁷ Taking into account the recommendations of a meeting held in Recife, Brazil, on reporting of developed country Parties.

²⁸ ICCD/CRIC(3)/INF.3.

indicators,²⁹ (b) information on seven priority areas of decision 8/COP 4,³⁰ and (c) inclusion of a country profile containing statistical data on geo-topographic, bio-physical and socio-economic indicators relevant for an assessment of desertification at the national level.

27. It was also suggested in the *Explanatory Note*³¹ that developed country Parties include in their report activities relating to decisions 1/COP.6, 4/COP.6 and 5/COP.6, where appropriate, in order to streamline the work of the CRIC and ensure proper follow-up of decisions taken at the level of the COP.

2. Country profiles

28. In response to the new format of the *Help Guide*, affected African country Parties submitted their country profile along with their national report. In order to assist the country Parties in the formulation of the country profiles, two African scientific organizations were engaged. However, some country Parties provided information directly to the secretariat, which led to differences in format. One country Party used a steering committee composed of representatives from all the relevant ministries to drive the process of country profile development, which could be an example to be replicated in other country Parties.

29. The country Parties were advised to provide data relating to bio-physical indicators and socio-economic indicators, which provide an overview of the situation of desertification and drought in the country.

30. From an analysis of the first country profile exercise, undertaken separately by the secretariat, the following observations could be made:

- In the bio-physical area, some indicators were not addressed. A number of country Parties did not provide information relating to the three most relevant indicators. Errors due to problems of measurement units and other obvious errors have been noted. Additional information about land degradation and rehabilitation of degraded land could be provided.
- In the socio-economic area, the responses were almost complete. It was noted that several of these indicators could be easily completed using the other publicly available data.

31. In terms of data sources, most country Parties relied on data from Government ministries and previous national reports. Several country Parties based their responses on international data provided by the UNEP, UNDP, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). However, many country profiles did not mention sources of data. Considerable discrepancies exist between available data sources in many categories, which could affect the consistency and accuracy of baseline information.

²⁹ Decision 1/COP.6.

³⁰ Decision 4/COP.6.

³¹ ICCD/CRIC(3)/INF.4.

3. Provision of information and format/quality of reports

32. Information provided in the following subsections is taken from the comments and recommendations made by the country Parties as reflected in the relevant syntheses and preliminary analyses prepared by the secretariat on the occasions of the first, second and third reporting processes and submitted to the COP and its subsidiary bodies, as well as in the final reports of subsidiary bodies of the COP.

(a) Reports by affected country Parties

33. Guidelines contained in decision 11/COP.1 and the *Help Guide* provided a common format for preparing the national reports, but variations remain with regard to the depth of coverage and content as well as in style of presentation. Under decision 11/COP.1, the information provided in national reports is supplemented by information provided at the subregional and regional levels, as well as that contained in other reports, in order to enable the COP to review the implementation of the Convention in the light of experience at the national, subregional, regional and international levels. As far as subregional action programmes (SRAPs) are concerned, the information was taken from the reports submitted by IGOs and subregional organizations which act as focal points or liaison centres for subregional activities. Concerning the regional action programmes (RAPs), the reports describe progress in this area as facilitated by the secretariat at the request of affected country Parties of that region. No specific formats were provided by the COP for subregional and regional reports.

34. It was often perceived that beyond the question of form, a major difference could be observed in the substance and the quality of the various reports submitted. The questions suggested in the *Help Guide* for each of the sections did not appear to have received careful consideration. This could be due to one or more of the following reasons: (a) the Parties are not in a position to report the information required (for example because of a lack of information due to a lack of activities), (b) a lack of coordination in information sharing, (c) NFP was not at that time sufficiently exposed to the UNCCD process, or (d) the Parties did not have sufficient resources or capacity to comply. For those Parties that followed the *Help Guide*, the coverage under each subheading or element varied in scope and depth, probably due to the availability or otherwise of information.

35. Comparison between the reports submitted in different reporting cycles was very difficult in some cases, insofar as the progress made and the constraints encountered were not enumerated chronologically. Some elements or subheadings of the *Help Guide* were covered by country Parties more extensively in their previous reports, and some more extensively in their new reports. Differentiation between the first and second reporting cycles was not always clear - this may be due to the short time interval between the two. Furthermore, the format suggested in the *Help Guide* applies in some of its aspects to the earlier stages of the implementation of the Convention. In order to facilitate assessment of the progress made between reporting processes, information could be organized differently. A time profile of activities could be given, showing when they started, the expected completion date, and so on.

36. It became evident that more accurate data are needed to provide a clear picture of what is going on at the national level; to this end, the use of benchmarks and indicators could be useful. Very few of the reports provide details on how Parties are using impact indicators, or

whether these indicators are being tested in the field, as requested by various decisions of the COP. No reason has been given as to why the decisions³² proposed by the CST on specific technical and scientific activities undertaken to combat desertification have not been more widely adopted.

37. Considering that the recommendations of the CST had not been taken into account in most of the national reports, the full participation of the scientific community in the process was urged by the CRIC. The CST urged NFPs to involve fully members of the scientific community in the formulation and implementation of the national action programme (NAP), and suggested that where their involvement were not possible, Parties should include in their report an analysis of the reasons for the difficulties.

(b) Reports by developed country Parties

38. In decision 11/COP.1, the COP requested developed country Parties to report on measures taken to support the preparation and implementation of action programmes, including information on the financial resources they have provided, or are providing, under the Convention. The format and content of these reports are specified in paragraph 10(c) of decision 11/COP.1. An informal meeting was held during COP 3, the conclusions of which were reflected in the *Explanatory Note* drafted by the secretariat. In this note, the secretariat recommended that each section should consist of one part dealing strictly with the implementation of the Convention and another part dealing with other activities relating to combating desertification.

39. At the beginning, many reports submitted followed their own format, and it was not easy or often even not possible to draw pertinent conclusions on emerging trends in the support provided by developed country Parties. That has improved over time, however, and by COP 4, the reports submitted by developed country Parties were much more homogeneous than previously. In some of them, however, instead of proceeding region by region, consultative processes are described together with the measures taken to assist in the preparation and implementation of action programmes. In other cases, the report is structured in accordance with the organization of their own international cooperation mechanisms. Generally speaking, most of the summaries covered the whole of the report rather than each of its geographically defined parts. The length of the reports varies from one to 40 pages.

40. In nearly all their reports, the developed country Parties stated that they had difficulty in distinguishing between measures to combat desertification under the UNCCD and global activities relating to the integrated management of natural resources. Many reports referred to technical assistance provided with regard to global environmental issues, rather than directly addressing the issue of desertification. As a result, there were often imbalances, not only between the different parts of the reports but also among the reports themselves, according to what each developed country Party had considered as falling strictly within the scope of the Convention. The reports provide details on activities to combat desertification, while little information is provided on measures taken to implement the Convention, and in particular on the preparation and implementation of NAPs, or on support for NCBs and NFPs.

³² In particular, decisions 10/COP.4 and 10/COP.5.

41. Lately, there have been efforts to share information on reporting under the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and its Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and reporting of developed country Parties under the UNCCD, and to consider the possible benefits and problems relating to the establishment of linkages between the two reporting processes. Reporting to the OECD/DAC takes place mainly through the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) which covers all forms of official development assistance (ODA) and official assistance (OA, to countries in transition). This system enables analysis of, *inter alia*, sectoral and geographical allocation of the aid. The OECD/DAC statistics only capture ODA, while other sources of funding (that is, debt swap, funds from food aid, carbon funds) are normally not included in OECD/DAC reports.

42. The OECD/DAC developed the Convention-specific pilot criteria (known as “Rio markers”) to assist the OECD member countries in defining and reporting relevant activities. On this basis, some OECD member countries and the GM, together with the OECD/DAC divisions on environment and statistics, have started to discuss the options to eliminate the discrepancies from the various aid statistics concerning activities to combat desertification. The value of harmonized financial data on desertification-related aid is evident, as a means both of producing reliable analysis of the status and trends of assistance, and of informing the countries on the activities funded by the donor community. Linking the OECD/DAC data collection with UNCCD reporting could also facilitate the reporting process of the donor countries.

43. It is to be noted that only one developed country Party submitted information based on these guidelines in its national report under the UNCCD in 2005.

4. Financial and technical support

44. It is often stated that the quality of the national reports by affected developing country Parties and the related presentations could have been improved if the funding for reporting activities had been more predictable and consistent. Reporting obligations under the various MEAs often overstretch the technical and financial capacities of developing country Parties.

45. Prior to the first reporting cycle, the secretariat received requests from various African country Parties for assistance to enable them to meet their obligations with respect to reporting to the COP on the status of implementation of the Convention. Similar requests were received from the subregional organizations, seeking technical and financial support for the preparation of reports on implementation of the Convention by their respective member States, and also for the preparation of the subregional reports on implementation of the Convention. To reinforce this process, the secretariat supported the convening of consultative meetings of subregional organization representatives, with the objective of finding ways and means to provide technical and financial support to the affected countries in preparing their national reports. Subregional organizations may also be instrumental in establishing a suitable framework at the country level for the future process of reporting to sessions of the COP.

46. The secretariat has been soliciting financial resources to support the preparation of national reports from various partners, and a number of developed countries, IGOs and United Nations organizations have responded to this call. For the first reporting process, this assistance totalled approximately US\$ 875,000, while for the second process approximately US\$ 850,000 were mobilized. Additional support to affected developing country Parties was provided through the GM.³³ The financial support for the third reporting process of African country Parties was provided through the Medium-Size Project “Supporting Capacity Building for the Elaboration of National Reports and Country Profiles by African Parties to the UNCCD” of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), co-financed by the World Bank, amounting to US\$ 1,600,000.³⁴ Some other partners were involved through technical support which they channelled directly to the Governments concerned.

47. It should also be mentioned that, before the first reporting process, the secretariat was requested³⁵ to report to COP 3 on activities undertaken by the secretariat in assisting developing country Parties in the preparation of reports on the implementation of the Convention.³⁶ This request was not made for the second and third reporting processes.

5. Capacity

48. A distinct advantage of the process of evaluating the progress of implementation of the Convention is that it helps to strengthen the capacity of the NCBs and NFPs to fulfil their respective mandates. The overall goal was to provide the COP with sufficient information for it to make concrete recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention. It was also expected that this process would contribute to the establishment of mechanisms for participatory assessment of the implementation of the Convention within the NAP process.

49. Before the first reporting process, the subregional organizations were involved in the coordination of the preparation of national reports of their respective member States. They requested the secretariat to facilitate the organization of planning workshops where the NFPs would be involved in designing the process of preparation of the national reports, which were organized in collaboration with subregional organizations and other IGOs. These consultative meetings were held with the various NFPs, subregional organizations’ representatives and consultants who had been selected to assist with the preparation of reports. The aim of these meetings was to broaden the constituency of actors involved in this process and to prepare these to be directly involved in report formulation, while at the same time strengthening the capacity of the NCBs to respond to the requirements of the COP in this respect. Similar support was also given to those countries which are not members of subregional organizations but which have requested such assistance from the secretariat. In addition, and upon request from the countries, the organization of national workshops was facilitated. At these workshops, the draft national reports were presented to the NCB.

³³ See reports of the GM to the COP contained in ICCD/COP(4)/4, ICCD/COP(5)/4 and ICCD/CRIC(2)/4.

³⁴ See also ICCD/CRIC(3)/2 and Add.1.

³⁵ Decision 5/COP.2.

³⁶ This report is contained in ICCD/COP(3)/5/Add.4.

50. Capacity building has become a clear priority within the MEAs, as emphasized by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The GEF Secretariat developed a strategic framework to give greater focus to capacity building in the GEF.³⁷ In May 1999, the GEF Council approved the Capacity Development Initiative (CDI) for the preparation of a comprehensive approach for building capacities at the country level. Based on the findings of the CDI and proposed actions,³⁸ the GEF Council requested its Secretariat to consult further with the Rio conventions and with IGOs and NGOs participating in capacity-building activities, and to initiate processes for the funding of one of the proposed activities - the self-assessment of capacity-building needs - in countries requesting such assistance. The National Capacity Needs Self Assessment (NCSA) programme is now fully operational, and guidelines to assist countries in preparing their NCSAs have been prepared by the GEF Secretariat.³⁹ Approximately 50 countries have launched NCSA projects so far, and over 100 countries have expressed an interest in conducting an NCSA.

6. Involvement of stakeholders/participatory approach

51. On several occasions, both the COP and its subsidiary bodies observed shortcomings in the involvement of civil society, NGOs and women in the UNCCD-related processes, as reflected in some country Parties' reports. Parties recognized the need to adjust their national reporting to the evolving needs of the implementation process, notably with respect to the activities relating to the involvement of civil society. A need to improve the *Help Guide* in terms of the inclusion of a certain number of indicators on civil society involvement into the process of the formulation and implementation of action programmes was often emphasized, as well as the fact that it was crucial to have NGOs involved in the formulation of these criteria. The CRIC at its first session stressed that the coverage content of national reports should be updated and that the effective involvement of civil society in the assessment of progress should be more actively encouraged. This recommendation was taken up by COP 6.⁴⁰

52. The CRIC also recommended that an in-depth review of national reports be conducted to analyse and facilitate the process of upscaling into national programmes of successful participatory local-level initiatives and/or synergistic approaches, with a view to bearing upon sectoral or macro policy frameworks. This recommendation was not taken up by the COP.

B. Reports from United Nations organizations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

53. Relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as other IGOs and NGOs, are encouraged to provide information, as appropriate, on their activities in support of the preparation and implementation of action programmes under the Convention.⁴¹ The secretariat is requested to compile such information and to submit a report to the COP.

³⁷ http://www.gefweb.org/Documents/Enabling_Activity_Projects/CDI/Strategic_Approach_to_Enhance_Capacity_Building_FINAL.doc

³⁸ Elements of strategic collaboration and a framework for GEF action for capacity building for the global environment, GEF/ C.17/Rev.1, May 2001.

³⁹ A Guide for Self-Assessment of Country Capacity Needs for Global Environmental Management, September 2001.

⁴⁰ Decision 1/COP.6.

⁴¹ Decision 11/COP.1.

54. Compared to the guidance given to country Parties, the COP has provided less guidance on the way reports should be prepared by relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as by other IGOs. International organizations involved in the UNCCD process have different mandates and fields of operation. Consequently, the content of their reports constantly differs from one organization to the other. United Nations agencies, for instance, focus their reports on technical assistance they have provided to, and their development cooperation programmes with, affected developing country Parties. Financial institutions often report on the support provided, through other specialized and development agencies, to land management programmes at national, subregional and regional levels. Subregional organizations, which are often much more deeply involved in the UNCCD implementation, report also on assistance in the preparation and implementation of NAPs. As a consequence of this, the heterogeneous material received by the secretariat does not allow for substantive and meaningful analysis of support provided by IGOs to the process. For instance, information provided by financial institutions can hardly be compared with those from bilateral partners, which results in incomplete assessment of the development aid flows. The lack of a specific format for reports from IGOs has also generated more complexity in terms of collection and analysis of data, due essentially to considerable disparities in terms of size (ranging from one to 14 pages), format and content.

55. Following the established practice and in order to ensure the effective implementation of the participative approach promoted by the UNCCD, NGOs were encouraged to channel their reports through their respective NFPs. In order to ensure a successful exercise, the Governments of country Parties should effectively involve the NGO input in the reporting process and consequently fully take into consideration, and integrate, relevant information provided by them. In this way, the national reports would represent a comprehensive document reporting on efforts undertaken by all stakeholders, including the non-governmental ones, in the implementation of the UNCCD.

C. Reports from financial institutions

56. Reports from financial institutions are included in the category of reports by IGOs and United Nations organizations, without any indication as to the format to be followed in the preparation of these reports. Only the GEF has received special attention from the COP, as detailed in the relevant sections of this report.

57. The reports from financial institutions are occasionally prepared by those organizations more directly involved in the UNCCD process. Again, this makes unreliable any statistics concerning the financial support to the UNCCD, its magnitude and trends, or any comparison by source of funding. In addition, additional information on assistance provided to affected developing country Parties is channelled through the secretariat, which was entrusted with the task of compiling and summarizing reports, while important elements on resource mobilization are included in the report of the GM.

D. Reporting by the secretariat

58. The secretariat's functions include assisting countries in discharging their responsibilities under the Convention and providing any necessary assistance to the sessions

of the COP and its subsidiary bodies.⁴² This mandate implies the obligation to provide the COP and its subsidiary bodies with the requested reports, as well as to compile information from other entities and to present information submitted to it.

59. In addition to the compilations of summaries, syntheses and preliminary analyses of reports from Parties and observers on the implementation of the Convention, for which the secretariat is processing information received by relevant entities according to well-defined procedures, the secretariat is also requested to prepare other specific reports aimed at facilitating the review of implementation by the COP.

60. For each COP, the secretariat prepares a document reviewing progress made by affected country Parties in implementation of the Convention, in which the secretariat elaborates on the execution of its function, with particular emphasis on its assistance to affected developing country Parties, particularly those in Africa, in the compilation and communication of information required under the Convention.⁴³ Also, for each COP the secretariat prepares a special document on coordination of its activities with the secretariats of other relevant international bodies and conventions.⁴⁴

61. In particular, the COP requested the secretariat⁴⁵ to prepare a report on its medium-term strategy. The COP took note of the medium-term strategy proposed by the secretariat⁴⁶ and requested it, *inter alia*, to facilitate the effective assessment of progress towards attaining the objectives of the Convention by compiling, summarizing and synthesizing all reports on implementation submitted to it.⁴⁷

62. The COP further requested the Executive Secretary to undertake an overall review of secretariat activities and to submit a report thereon to COP 6 for consideration.⁴⁸

63. The COP also requested the Executive Secretary to submit to COP 7 an interim report on the implementation of the Declaration on the commitments to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention.⁴⁹

64. One of the further reporting obligations of the secretariat refers to the financial performance of the Convention budget. This involves submitting to the COP a proposed programme and budget as well as reporting to the COP on the status of various funds such as the supplementary fund and the special fund.⁵⁰ The secretariat was also asked to submit proposals on how the budgeting and reporting process could be improved, taking into account the developments and practices in relevant IGOs, and to propose any adjustments which might be needed.⁵¹

⁴² Convention text, article 23, paragraph 2.

⁴³ Convention text, article 23(c).

⁴⁴ Ibid, article 23(d).

⁴⁵ Decision 7/COP.2.

⁴⁶ ICCD/COP(3)/6.

⁴⁷ Decision 2/COP.3.

⁴⁸ ICCD/CRIC(2)/2.

⁴⁹ Decision 4/COP.6.

⁵⁰ Decisions 6/COP.1, 7/COP.1, 8/COP.1, 6/COP.2, 3/COP.3, 4/COP.4, 4/COP.5 and 23/COP.6.

⁵¹ Decision 3/COP.3.

65. Many reporting obligations of the secretariat refer to CST-related matters, for instance reports on traditional knowledge⁵² and on improving the efficiency and the effectiveness of the CST.⁵³ The secretariat was also requested to maintain and make available in different forms the roster of independent experts.⁵⁴

66. In addition, the secretariat was asked by the COP to report on various ad hoc matters, for instance on its role in facilitating the convocation of consultative processes in order to negotiate and conclude partnership agreements based on action programmes and the results obtained⁵⁵ or to collect and disseminate success stories and best practices in combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought which keep in mind the due focus on poverty eradication in affected areas.⁵⁶ The secretariat was also requested to participate in intergovernmental processes of particular relevance to the UNCCD, such as the follow-up to the outcome of the WSSD, and to report thereon to the COP.⁵⁷

67. The secretariat was further requested to receive, compile and make a synthesis of input provided in writing by the Parties and observers on matters other than those pertaining to basic reporting obligations, for instance on procedures and/or additional mechanisms for the review of implementation of the Convention⁵⁸ and on questions of implementation, arbitration and conciliation procedures.⁵⁹ A specific format for, or guidance on how to prepare, this input was not always provided, and a synthesis of heterogeneous material may not always fully reflect countries' positions.

E. Reporting by the Global Mechanism

68. According to the Convention and relevant decisions of the COP, the GM was given regular/permanent, periodical and ad hoc obligations to report.

69. By article 21 of the Convention, the GM functions under the authority and guidance of the COP and is accountable to it. The GM has to report to the COP at each ordinary session on its operations and activities and particularly on the effectiveness of its activities in promoting the mobilization and channelling of the substantial financial resources and on the assessment of future availability of funds for implementation of the Convention, as well as on the assessment of, and proposals for, effective ways and means of providing such funds.⁶⁰ This report has to encompass the operations and activities of the GM as described in that decision, and also a new element, consisting of the activities of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNDP and the World Bank, as well as other relevant organizations, in supporting the GM,⁶¹ that is, of its Facilitation Committee.⁶²

⁵² Decisions 20/COP.1, 14/COP.2 and 16/COP.6.

⁵³ Decision 17/COP.4.

⁵⁴ Decisions 19/COP.1, 15/COP.4 and 15/COP.5.

⁵⁵ Decision 5/COP.3.

⁵⁶ Decision 1/COP.6.

⁵⁷ Decision 2/COP.6.

⁵⁸ Decisions 5/COP.2, 6/COP.3, 3/COP.4, 1/COP.5 and 7/COP.6.

⁵⁹ Decisions 20/COP.3, 20/COP.4, 21/COP.5 and 22/COP.6.

⁶⁰ Decision 24/COP.1.

⁶¹ Decisions 25/COP.1 and 10/COP.3.

⁶² Decision 9/COP.3.

70. A periodical obligation to report was established by the COP with a view to reviewing policies, operational modalities and activities of the GM.⁶³ Reports relating to this matter were submitted to COP 3 and CRIC 2.⁶⁴ The GM, like the secretariat, was not given a specific reporting format. However, at the second review, the GM was requested to report to COP 7 on progress made in carrying out its activities.⁶⁵

71. Ad hoc reporting obligations were given to the GM, such as that by which the Executive Secretary of the Convention and the Managing Director of the GM were requested to prepare a guide to help affected developing country Parties and to report at each session on their role in facilitating these processes, and the results obtained.⁶⁶ Another reporting obligation was the request to the GM to establish a process of collaboration with the NGO community and other interested organizations, including the private sector, and to report to the COP on modalities regarding this.⁶⁷

72. A particularity of this reporting process is that the GM does not report directly to the COP, as the other institutions do, but is requested to report to the COP through the Head of its housing organization, the IFAD.⁶⁸

73. A shortcoming in the reporting scheme of the GM may be caused by the fact that the GM is requested to report to the COP, that is (in view of decision 1/COP.5), to the CRIC at its sessions which coincide with the sessions of the COP. However, the review of available information regarding the mobilization and use of financial resources and other support by multilateral agencies and institutions is also on the agenda of inter-sessional sessions of the CRIC,⁶⁹ which implies that the CRIC at its inter-sessional sessions discusses this matter without the report submitted by the GM to this purpose.

74. The GM, together with the CST, was invited to provide to the COP (and more recently to the CRIC) advice and information to be used for the review of the implementation of the Convention.⁷⁰ This provision has been interpreted as oral statements by the GM representatives at COP/CRIC sessions, and the records of these statements were not always included in the proceedings (particularly in the case of CRIC 1).

IV. ANALYSIS CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO THE INTENDED RECIPIENT OF THE INFORMATION

75. By decision 11/COP.1, the Parties are requested to communicate information to the COP through the secretariat. The secretariat has processed these reports in a prescribed manner and has submitted official documents to the COP within a defined time frame. Since the establishment of the CRIC, the documents relating to the implementation of the Convention have been transmitted to it for initial review and its recommendations to the COP. Other entities are occasionally requested to report directly to the COP; in this process, the secretariat just forwards the material received using the required facilities and channels to

⁶³ Convention text, article 21, paragraph 7 and decisions 9/COP.3 and 5/COP.6.

⁶⁴ ICCD/COP(3)/11 and ICCD/CRIC(2)/5.

⁶⁵ Decision 5/COP.6.

⁶⁶ Decision 5/COP.3.

⁶⁷ Decisions 25/COP.1 and 18/COP.2.

⁶⁸ Decisions 25/COP.1 and 10/COP.3.

⁶⁹ Decisions 1/COP.5 and 9/COP.6.

⁷⁰ Decisions 6/COP.3, 1/COP.4, 3/COP.4 and 1/COP.5.

communicate information to the COP. This is the case, for instance, for the invitation by the COP to the Council of the GEF to report as appropriate to the COP on matters relating to the issue of land degradation.⁷¹ Ad hoc panels of experts on CST-related matters are also requested to report directly to the COP, without prior consideration by the relevant subsidiary body.

76. The COP also receives reports from its subsidiary bodies. The CRIC is requested, at its inter-sessional sessions, to prepare a comprehensive report, including conclusions and recommendations, for consideration by the COP. The CST, which does not meet inter-sessionally, prepares a report to the COP in the form of draft decisions, introduced by oral statements by the CST Chairperson during the COP.

77. It is to be noticed that the decisions of the COP do not strictly separate the COP and the CST in matters covered by the CST. This is the case with regard to the ad hoc panel on traditional knowledge, which was to report to the COP.⁷² Since the CST is responsible for this matter, the CST should logically be the body to which the ad hoc panel should address its findings. Similarly, the Parties were requested to report on benchmarks and indicators to the COP,⁷³ instead of being asked to direct their reports to the CST which is the subsidiary body of the COP in charge of these matters. The CST receives reports requested by the COP on relevant matters and according to its agenda and programme of work. Only the reports on the roster of independent experts are transmitted to the COP.⁷⁴

78. By decision 1/COP.5 and the terms of reference of the CRIC, the CRIC took over all matters relating to the implementation of the Convention, while the COP continued to receive reports on the programme and budget and legal matters.

79. CST-related matters dealt with by the CRIC at the specific request of the COP, should be transmitted to the COP for its consideration. After review by the CRIC at its inter-sessional sessions, however, conclusions and recommendations on these matters were formally transmitted to the CST Chairperson, for consideration at the subsequent session of the CST. This avoided jeopardizing the review process and the reflecting of CST-related matters in the deliberations of the competent subsidiary body.

V. ANALYSIS CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO THE TOPIC OF INFORMATION

A. Matters relating to the Committee on Science and Technology

80. Together with the reports provided by country parties and IGOs and United Nations organizations, and the input of the GM, advice and information provided by the CST constitutes the fundamental element of the review of the implementation by the COP.⁷⁵ According to decision 1/COP.6, the CST was requested to review the provisions of the report

⁷¹ Decision 14/COP.1.

⁷² Decision 14/COP.2.

⁷³ Decision 22/COP.1.

⁷⁴ ICCD/COP(1)/6, ICCD/COP(2)/11, ICCD/COP(3)/14/Add.1, ICCD/COP(4)/5/Add.1, ICCD/COP(6)/8/Add.1.

⁷⁵ Decision 11/COP.1, confirmed by decision 1/COP.5.

of the CRIC on various CST-related matters and to propose suitable scientific measures for their improvement.

81. Parties were encouraged to provide information and comments to the secretariat on the overall role of traditional and local technology, and on the usefulness of using benchmarks and indicators in the national reporting. The secretariat was requested to prepare a synthesis of such reports and to submit it to the CST.⁷⁶ Using the reports prepared by the secretariat, the CST was supposed to make a contribution to the review of national reports.⁷⁷ The Parties were also requested⁷⁸ to supplement their submissions to the secretariat for inclusion in the roster of independent experts and to report on the use they have made of the roster.⁷⁹ Both Parties and observers were invited to collate information regarding traditional knowledge and to report to the secretariat.⁸⁰ The Parties are requested to include in their national reports on implementation information about the use they have made of traditional knowledge in the implementation of NAPs.⁸¹ The Parties and observers were invited⁸² to provide written comments on the proposed methodology for impact indicators with the aim of enabling a comparison of desertification status and urged to make use of indicators in national reporting to the COP.⁸³ The development and testing of appropriate benchmarks and indicators was stressed as being a major task for country Parties.⁸⁴

82. The fact that a number of items on the CST agenda are constantly re-proposed⁸⁵ and that new items are added results in proliferation of reports relating to CST matters, which do not always lead to a particular action by the COP.

B. Specific requests for reporting called for by the Conference of the Parties

83. In addition to the central obligation of the Parties to communicate information on implementation of the Convention, defined in decision 11/COP.1, there are a number of other requests for input from the Parties set forth by the COP. For example, the COP invited all country Parties to assess and evaluate progress made in implementing the Convention.⁸⁶ By a number of decisions,⁸⁷ country Parties, as well as other interested institutions and organizations, including NGOs, were encouraged to submit written proposals about procedures and/or additional mechanisms for the review of the implementation of the Convention.

84. The COP often requested other entities to report on ad hoc items. Whenever the information required did not fall into an agenda item of the COP or its subsidiary bodies, separate documents were provided. Generally, the COP did not provide specific guidelines for these reporting requests.

⁷⁶ Decisions 20/COP.1, 14/COP.2 and 16/COP.4.

⁷⁷ Decision 17/COP.5.

⁷⁸ Decision 19/COP.1.

⁷⁹ Decisions 15/COP.3, 15/COP.4, 15/COP.5 and 13/COP.6.

⁸⁰ Decision 20/COP.1.

⁸¹ Decision 12/COP.3.

⁸² Decision 22/COP.1

⁸³ Decision 11/COP.3.

⁸⁴ Decisions 11/COP.3, 11/COP.5 and 17/COP.6.

⁸⁵ See for instance decision 16/COP.4.

⁸⁶ Decision 5/COP.3.

⁸⁷ Decisions 5/COP.2, 6/COP.3, 3/COP.4, 1/COP.5 and 7/COP.6.

C. Collaboration with other relevant conventions and other relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies

85. Article 8 of the UNCCD asks the Parties to encourage the coordination of activities carried out under the UNCCD and other relevant MEAs, particularly the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Ever since its first session, the COP has repeatedly requested the secretariat to make all efforts to strengthen the collaboration with other relevant conventions and in particular, the CBD, the UNFCCC, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, as well as other conventions relating to sustainable development, and to report thereon to the COP.⁸⁸

86. Pursuant to provisions of the Convention,⁸⁹ the COP shall promote and strengthen relationships with other relevant conventions. Reports on collaboration and synergies among the Rio conventions have been prepared by the secretariat since the second session of the COP.⁹⁰ In these documents, the secretariat reported on its own activities undertaken towards achieving synergies and those undertaken in cooperation with relevant international organizations (notably the UNEP, WMO, UNESCO and UNDP), as well as on specific programmes implemented at national, subregional and regional levels. The other Rio conventions' secretariats reported similarly to their governing bodies.⁹¹

87. The role of the Joint Liaison Group (JLG), established on the initiative and at the level of the executive secretaries of the three Rio conventions, was recognized by the COPs. The UNCCD COP, for instance, asked it to identify possible areas for developing joint activities, including the facilitation of local-level initiatives.⁹² At the request of the JLG, the three secretariats have jointly prepared a paper entitled "Options for enhanced cooperation among the three Rio conventions", which was submitted to the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA).⁹³

88. On several occasions, the COP requested the secretariat to give special attention to the COPs of other conventions where matters linked to desertification, land degradation, land use, land-use change and forestry or dryland biodiversity were discussed, which generated forms of cross-reporting (bodies of different conventions reporting to each other). For instance, the secretariat was requested to prepare a report on traditional knowledge in dryland ecosystems in time for its presentation to the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the CBD.⁹⁴

89. The matter of joint reporting by the Parties under the three Rio conventions was also addressed at the level of the JLG. It was recognized that the different obligations of Parties under these conventions would make joint reporting neither cost-effective nor practicable.

⁸⁸ Decisions 13/COP.1, 8/COP.2, 17/COP.3, 7/COP.5 and 12/COP.6.

⁸⁹ Convention text, article 22, paragraph 2(i).

⁹⁰ ICCD/COP(2)/7, ICCD/COP(3)/9 and Add.1, ICCD/COP(4)/6, ICCD/COP(5)/6, ICCD/CRIC(1)/9 and ICCD/COP(6)/4.

⁹¹ For example, FCCC/SBSTA/2004/INF.9, FCCC/SB/2003/1, FCCC/SBSTA/2002/MISC.9 and Add.1, FCCC/SBSTA/2002/3, UNEP/CBD/COP/7/19 and UNEP/CBD/COP/6/15.

⁹² Decision 7/COP.6.

⁹³ FCCC/SBSTA/2004/INF.19.

⁹⁴ Decision 14/COP.2.

90. Recently, the COP decided to request the Group of Experts to formulate a road map for developing synergies with other conventions, organizations and intergovernmental treaties.⁹⁵ This was reflected in the two-year work plan of the Group of Experts, where the plan includes developing synergies with other related conventions, organizations and intergovernmental treaties, in order to avoid duplication of effort and establish mechanisms for interaction.

91. A specific aspect of UNCCD collaboration with other relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies which generated other cluster of reports is the collaboration with the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) and with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA).⁹⁶

D. Collaboration with the Global Environment Facility

92. At the very outset, the COP took a number of decisions on collaboration with the financial institutions, in particular with the GEF,⁹⁷ putting them in a special position as compared to other IGOs, due to the particular need for the UNCCD to identify predictable sources of funding. The COP paid particular attention to the deliberations of the GEF Council in support of the implementation of the Convention, and requested the secretariat to follow up this matter and report thereon to the COP. The secretariat regularly prepared reports on its cooperation with the GEF, which have been taken up by the CRIC since its establishment, together with other available information regarding the financing of the Convention implementation.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, these reports were primarily focused on GEF-related matters, in order to avoid duplication of information provided elsewhere. It is to be noted that such reports were prepared by the secretariat based on its cooperation with the GEF, while no input in written form to these documents has been provided by the GEF.

VI. ANALYSIS CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO THE WAYS IN WHICH THE INFORMATION IS COMMUNICATED

93. In several COP decisions, different reporting requests to the Parties and observers were introduced, for instance, the request to present to the secretariat a short report about the use of traditional knowledge.⁹⁹ This particular information was, however, later included in the national reports.¹⁰⁰ A similar request was also made with regard to presenting short reports on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST¹⁰¹, on early warning systems¹⁰², and on benchmarks and indicators¹⁰³, whereby prescribed length of input by the Parties and observers varied or was not indicated.

⁹⁵ Decision 15/COP.6.

⁹⁶ Decisions 18/COP.4, 3/COP.5, 19/COP.5 and 19/COP.6.

⁹⁷ Decisions 14/COP.1, 17/COP.3, 9/COP.4, 9/COP.5 and 6/COP.6.

⁹⁸ ICCD/CRIC(1)/8 and ICCD/CRIC(2)/6.

⁹⁹ Decision 20/COP.1.

¹⁰⁰ According to decision 12/COP.3, as a follow-up to recommendations made in ICCD/COP(3)/CST.3.

¹⁰¹ Decision 17/COP.4.

¹⁰² Decision 18/COP.6.

¹⁰³ Decision 22/COP.1.

94. Occasionally, the exact method for communication of the requested information is not specified, as for instance when the country Parties were requested to report on the usefulness of implementation indicators and the practicality of using these indicators in national reporting without any further information on the particularities of this report.¹⁰⁴

95. Another category of information to be communicated consists of the different types of input requested by the COP from the bodies of the Convention, that is, from the CST, the GM and others. In most cases, although the subject of the reporting requirement is more or less clearly defined, there are no specifications as to the format and the exact way of submitting the requested input. In a number of COP decisions,¹⁰⁵ the CST and the GM were invited to provide advice and information to be used for the review of the implementation of the Convention. No further information as to the intended way of communicating this information is included in the decisions.

96. Similar, for instance, is the request of the COP to the Group of Experts of the CST to make their results available, by appropriate means, as they become available and to report on their activities at COP 7.¹⁰⁶ The only precise instruction included in this decision is a request to the Group of Experts to improve its efficiency by using the Internet as the primary means of communication and by using primarily, whenever possible, one working language (English).

VII. ANALYSIS CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO THE TIME CYCLE FOR COMMUNICATING THE INFORMATION

97. Parties are requested to submit their reports to the secretariat at least six months prior to the session at which they are to be reviewed.¹⁰⁷ Often, however, the reports arrive after this deadline, which means that the syntheses and preliminary analyses prepared by the secretariat do not cover all the reports submitted due to the time limits for issuing official documents set by the United Nations General Assembly as well as relevant decisions of the COP. The summaries of all reports were, however, included in the compilation of summaries and are available on the UNCCD web site for reference.

98. Furthermore, in reports written under pressure of time, some useful information might have been omitted. For example, a few reports of affected country Parties did not document the consultative and participatory process leading to the convening of the national awareness forums, and some others did not state whether or not the national forum has been or will be convened.

99. The analysis has shown that Parties are given on average six months before the COP to submit most of the information requested by the COP.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Decisions 6/COP.3, 3/COP.4 and 1/COP.5.

¹⁰⁶ Decision 15/COP.6.

¹⁰⁷ Decision 11/COP.1.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

100. Generally, it can be concluded that the procedures for communication of information have evolved over the time since the Convention was adopted and have become more and more complex. While the basic provisions set out in the Convention remain pertinent and have proven their relevance over time, a growing number of decisions made by the COP requiring the Parties, the secretariat, the GM, IGOs and NGOs and other actors to provide information to the COP and its subsidiary bodies contributes to the situation whereby compliance with some of these decisions is becoming increasingly difficult. This has become even more evident with the establishment of the CRIC, whose terms of reference, in addition to other COP decisions, place on the Parties and observers new requirements which have not been previewed in decision 11/COP.1 on procedures for communication of information.

101. The need further to improve the quality and format of national reports has been recognized by the Parties on numerous occasions. It is clear that reports submitted to the COP represent indispensable information regarding the implementation of the UNCCD and should serve as crucial elements in decision-making processes relating to the UNCCD process. Given the shift of focus from institution-building to the adoption of action programmes and their implementation, the need for these reports to emphasize a result-oriented approach, rather than listing individual activities, becomes clear. It becomes essential to focus on matters emerging from action programmes, so that the CRIC and the COP can effectively assess the fulfilment of the objectives of the Convention. An in-depth review of national reports should be facilitated by the secretariat and partner agencies to promote knowledge management through a more substantive ground assessment of the implementation of the Convention at national level. This review should underline, *inter alia*, the usefulness of lessons learned with respect to land and water issues, improved livelihood and poverty reduction, and should focus on the impact of the measures taken.

102. The needs of country Parties as regards their capacity to draft reports, collect information and relevant statistical data, and submit national reports in time, should be addressed in a more systematic way. In spite of the efforts being made in this respect, the financial constraints in the preparation of such reports still prevent country Parties from adopting a more sustainable and coherent approach to preparing the reports. Also, it is important to recognize the role that civil society organizations play in this respect and to take steps to promote partnerships which would foster participatory consultative processes at all levels. Furthermore, comprehensive national reporting procedures should be supported by a system of data collection, quality indicators, and monitoring and evaluation activities.

103. In order to improve the quality of the data, the CST Group of Experts could propose clear definitions of all indicators; review the information provided, in particular information about land degradation and rehabilitation indicators; and propose improvements to the country profiles format in order better to monitor and compare over time the data on land degradation and the rehabilitation of degraded land. Finally, these country profiles could be compiled and analysed in order to obtain a set of information that could be the baseline for further efforts in this respect. The information obtained in this way could also be posted on the UNCCD web site.

104. The modalities of analysis of the information provided by the reports submitted to the COP clearly depend on the criteria selected for the review of the implementation process. A joint evaluation of implementation by affected and developed country Parties could be considered as a method for assuring the global review of the implementation of the Convention, using consolidated findings. Affected country Parties stressed that reports by developed country Parties on their contributions to the UNCCD process should be more precise and complete, and that the reporting process before the CRIC should be more balanced in reflecting the obligations of all Parties. The *Help Guide* and appropriate other documentation could be adjusted to facilitate such a comparison.

105. Given that the mandate and functions of the Committee as contained in its terms of reference are subject to renewal at COP 7, in the light of lessons learned during the overall review of the Committee, and taking into consideration that the reporting process represents the main input into the process of reviewing the implementation of the Convention, which is, in turn, one of the main tasks provided for by the Convention, the CRIC may wish to take this opportunity to propose concrete actions for a review of the procedures of communication of information, in view of providing a simplified, consistent and process-oriented guidance to the Parties in fulfilling one of their main commitments defined in the Convention.

106. In order to achieve these goals, the CRIC at its third session may wish to consider proposing to COP 7 the establishment of an ad hoc working group on communication of information and its terms of reference, which may include, *inter alia*: (a) consolidating provisions contained in different decisions of the COP into a compendium to be used as guidelines to prepare reports and other information called for by the COP, (b) proposing more consistent procedures of interaction between subsidiary bodies and their reporting to the COP, (c) facilitating information management on impact assessment at the level of the secretariat, and (d) taking advantage of achievements of ongoing reporting processes, including those of other MEAs, with particular regard to resources mobilization and financing the implementation of the Convention. The working group would also take account of the new mandate and terms of reference of the CRIC which would be determined at COP 7. The working group would convene Parties' representatives appointed with due attention to equitable geographic representation of all regions, and would meet between the seventh and the eighth sessions of the COP. The outcome of the working group could be submitted to COP 8, with a view to the COP's making a decision on revised and consolidated procedures for the communication of information in view of improving the review of implementation of the Convention.

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