BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS OF AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES OF THE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Executive summary

Regional Annex III of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which covers all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), reviews the implementation of the Convention in the light of the points agreed by the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), which will be holding its third session in May 2005.

The Annex III countries wish to make the point that, in order to further the multilateral negotiation of the Convention, there is a need to identify the obstacles and opportunities that affect UNCCD implementation, particularly at national level, but without disregarding subregional and regional aspects. Implementation in the region has been very problematic; the affected country Parties have made considerable efforts with very few resources available. The difficulties encountered have included on the one hand financial limitations hampering the initiation of internal processes, and on the other hand a lack of awareness, both at national level and among international partners, regarding the magnitude and dimension of the problems that arise in the countries of the region.
The expectations related to UNCCD implementation based on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a financial mechanism have been met only - and to a very limited extent - in the short term, and greater difficulties are expected in the medium to long term. Many obstacles stand in the way of access to funds such as those of the GEF. The most obvious impediment is the poor or very weak national capacity for the preparation and design of proposals, combined with weak negotiating capacities in the multilateral international arena. It may also be pointed out that the allocation of funds in the multilateral spirit of the Convention is often influenced by the bilateral interests of donors. Moreover, the latter must be prepared to accept innovative methods of funding in order to supplement the modest resources allocated to the implementation of the Convention.

The Annex III countries consider that, as far as concrete actions to improve the implementation of the Convention are concerned, it must not be forgotten that, with regard to funding, there are ways and means of harnessing new and additional resources in order to achieve the Convention’s objectives, especially at national level. These include the development of common strategies subject to agreements, the creation of sustainable operating partnerships, an improved GEF response to the practical requirements of the country Parties and the use of innovative ways of obtaining such new and additional resources in a multilateral context. In this sense, the institutional role of the UNCCD’s secretariat should be strengthened, particularly with regard to programmes directly related to the regional applications contained in the Convention’s annexes. Regional coordination units should clearly be strengthened by the same occasion with a view to satisfying the requirements of each region. In addition, extra help and support are needed for Convention bodies, such as the Committee of Science and Technology (CST) and the Global Mechanism (GM). Both of these bodies are endowed with the necessary functions in practice for providing assistance alongside the secretariat to the affected country Parties.

In other aspects, such as the transfer of technologies and the improvement of sustainable traditional practices and technologies, very little effective support has been forthcoming. Higher standards of cooperation are required, both in scientific and technical areas and in local practical application and research activities in the developing world. The CST can play an important role by supporting and accepting feedback from the initiatives contained in regional implementation programmes. Greater emphasis must be placed on the promotion of South-South cooperation initiatives, such as the Platform for Interregional Cooperation between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, among others.

The LAC region has been very active in the endogenous development and use of scientific and technical aspects, which could be harmonized for country Parties of all the regions. For the dissemination of information, networks such as DESELAC should be strengthened in order to facilitate the effective exchange of information at low cost.

Additional firm support is needed for the development of national action programmes (NAP) in countries which are still preparing them, in accordance with the Bonn Declaration. Emphasis should also be placed on support for NAP implementation, within the framework of
countries’ national development agendas, such as national poverty reduction strategies, by including NAP priorities among basic national priorities for dry, arid and dry sub-humid areas of countries, subregions and regions. Those responsible for implementing NAP priorities must bear in mind that local communities are the main stakeholders in this process.

In order to achieve enhanced implementation, a comprehensive, coordinated model must be applied in order to promote synergies and to encourage the efficient use of the resources available to affected developing countries, with transparency and guaranteed international cooperation. This would only be possible, however, on the basis of clearly defined support on the part of the developed countries and multilateral agencies.
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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. The UNCCD was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 17 June 1994 and came into force on 26 December 1996, 90 days after it had been ratified by 50 countries.

2. The LAC region covers 33 countries, which for practical purposes may be subdivided into three subregions: the Caribbean, Mesoamerica and South America. Although the region is better known for its rainforests, about 25 per cent of the land is either dry or desertic. The UNCCD has been adopted by all the countries in the region.

3. This report, which was commissioned by the UNCCD secretariat, will be submitted to the third session of the CRIC, due to be held in May 2005. The document attempts to address the global issues raised in decision 9/COP.6, seen from the point of view of LAC country Parties.

4. The issues referred to in that decision are the following:

   – Review of available information regarding the mobilization and use of financial resources and other support by multilateral agencies and institutions, with a view to enhancing their effectiveness and efficiency towards the achievement of the objectives of the Convention, including information on the activities of the Global Environment Facility, the Global Mechanism and its Facilitation Committee;

   – Consideration of necessary adjustments to the elaboration process and the implementation of action programmes, including review of the enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention;

   – Consideration of ways and means of promoting know-how and technology transfer for combating desertification and/or mitigating the effects of drought, as well as of promoting experience sharing and information exchange among Parties and interested institutions and organizations;

   – 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.

II. MOBILIZATION AND USE OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF CONVENTION OBJECTIVES

5. The mobilization of financial resources in favour of the UNCCD process is undoubtedly one of the areas that needs to be strengthened further for effective implementation of the Convention. It has been difficult to obtain external resources for UNCCD-related activities, especially for implementation at national level, and funding has been more readily accessible through regional initiatives. In other words, countries find it hard to attract international cooperation individually, but their chances improve if a subregional project is submitted jointly with other countries.
6. The expectations raised when the Conference of the Parties (COP) accepted the GEF as an instrument for financing the Convention through Operational Programme 15 (OP 15) were disappointed in the event and still appear unfulfilled. The most obvious reason has been the countries’ failure to access this financial mechanism, partly because of their difficulty in formulating and managing projects within this framework.

7. On the other hand, following an independent evaluation of the GM, decision 5/COP.6 reassigned and focused its role, requesting it to concentrate mainly on its primary role of mobilizing financial resources to support UNCCD implementation by broadening the latter’s funding base, while placing greater emphasis on identifying and facilitating additional sources of co-financing for GEF projects. The decision also requested the GM to foster the supply side of bilateral and multilateral finance and partnership building for UNCCD implementation, as well as to adopt a joint work programme with the UNCCD’s secretariat and other agencies.

8. One of the obstacles to a more efficient mobilization of resources is the lack of any innovative and proactive approach. The majority of countries generally appeal to the same sources and usually no attempt is made to mobilize resources from sources other than international and multilateral agencies, such as the private sector within the framework of the new Corporate Social Responsibility programmes, which companies, particularly multinational and transnational companies, are setting up in many countries of the LAC region.¹

9. Furthermore, in the area of corporate transparency and accountability, no State incentives are being promoted, such as tax reductions, exemptions, premiums and other benefits, in order to reward companies, industries, traders, producers and associations which account each year for the use of donations granted and/or received and how they have benefited the communities.

10. But perhaps the greatest weakness in this respect lies in the affected countries’ limited capacity to negotiate the efficient and effective mobilization of resources for the implementation of NAPs and subregional action programmes (SRAPs). There are very few successful examples that come to mind. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is the insufficient dissemination of information concerning NAP and SRAP goals and objectives. Nevertheless it is clear that focal points have a very limited capacity to negotiate the management of resources allocated to the implementation of NAP priorities.

11. In the Caribbean, for example, Cuba, which hosted COP6 in 2003, has obtained limited funding for UNCCD implementation projects and is awaiting GEF approval for its Integrated Land and Water Conservation Programme. It is also negotiating a Country Partnership Programme (CPP) within the framework of the GEF’s OP15, which is to be carried out over 10 years in four stages. In the same subregion, GEF approval is also awaited for a project to reverse land degradation in the Sabana Yegua area of the Dominican Republic.

12. At the subregional level, a technical cooperation project was agreed under the Land Degradation Assessment for Drylands (LADA) scheme in February 2004, which will be submitted through the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and will focus on capacity-building
for assessing and combating land degradation in the Caribbean subregion. There is also a proposal for Least Developed Countries and Small Island States which has been submitted to the GEF to address aspects of the Convention in island ecosystems: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as other Caribbean countries such as Haiti, Belize, Suriname, Guyana and the Dominican Republic.

13. In Mesoamerica, only El Salvador, Panama, Honduras and Belize have obtained GEF funds in recent years in order to develop activities such as the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) Project for United Nations Conventions on the environment. Meanwhile Nicaragua is awaiting approval for a project for the sustainable management of land in degraded drought-prone areas.

14. In South America, Colombia has not yet sought external resources to implement its NAP, which was only completed in 2004. It has on the other hand requested GEF funding for validation workshops and the publication of its NAP document, though without success since such activities lie outside the scope of GEF funding.

15. Chile for its part obtained support for the preparation of a GEF project to strengthen its NAP and another for the sustainable development of the Puna Americana area. A GEF project is in the course of preparation in the framework of the Global Pastoral Programme. Chile has also obtained external resources from, amongst others, the Global Mechanism, the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ), the Inter-American Development Bank/Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IADB/IICA), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (Millenium Ecosystem Assessment), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the European Union, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Fund for the Americas and the UNCCD’s own secretariat.

16. In Peru the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism, amongst others, are preparing a Round Table of donors to work on the updating and financing of NAP priorities, whose preliminary task of identifying international partners, national stakeholders and the country’s main priorities is already under way.

17. One of the countries which has already received GEF support is Argentina, with the approval of funding to prepare a project in Patagonia. Since 2001 Argentina has also been carrying out a Land Degradation Assessment for Drylands (LADA) project, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation has been effective in recent years, particularly with Germany, Italy, the GM, IFAD, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and others.

18. Venezuela has been awaiting GEF approval for its project to combat land degradation in arid and semi-arid areas of the States of Lara and Falcon, while Brazil has two projects in the pipeline under OP15 aimed at restoring riparian forest ecosystems in São Paulo and the sustainable management of land in the semi-arid Sertão.

19. Nevertheless, the GEF itself has warned about the limited availability of funds for this focal area considering that, after 18 months of operations, the resources identified for approved
and running projects were already reaching the figure of US$ 250 million earmarked for the land degradation focal area under GEF-3, and that most of the projects which are now being added to the waiting list will only mature under GEF-4. It is expected moreover that the funding requirements for this focal area in GEF-4 will considerably exceed those allocated under GEF-3.  

20. The Global Mechanism provided assistance to countries which had not completed their NAPs, within the framework of the joint working group with the UNCCD secretariat, as well as to subregional programmes such as the SRAP for Hispaniola. In the South American subregion, Colombia received a contribution of US$ 20,000 from the GM for the preparation of its NAP, which was recently completed ready for validation.

21. Lastly it is worth mentioning that an international workshop was held in Brazil to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the UNCCD and the launch of the country’s NAP, with the support of the UNCCD’s secretariat and the Government of Germany, as part of the COP6 Initiative. Under this initiative, the Government of Germany has approved the allocation of 1,700,000 euros to support NAP implementation in Brazil.

III. ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE

22. During the IX LAC regional meeting held in Bogotá, a progress report was presented on the activities of the Group of Experts of the UNCCD’s CST, including: the elaboration of a common set of benchmarks and indicators for monitoring and assessing desertification; early warning systems; the updating of the World Atlas of Desertification (review of the current state of cartographic work, establishment of criteria and terms of reference for the new Atlas and the development of cartography); elaboration of a scientific research plan on land degradation (review and prioritization of current scientific activities, identification and prioritization of new research needs, identification of research programmes at the international and regional levels, elaboration of a comprehensive report); preparation of a glossary of desertification terms, and definition of a network for information exchange among national coordination centres (recommendations on the use of existing thematic databases, creation of an Internet discussion forum, and development of a meta-database).

23. Among the science and technology priorities mentioned were: the need to strengthen links with other conventions and agreements; improved coordination between NAPs and the RAP; and promotion of the activities of the Group of Independent Experts (GOE) created by decision 17/COP.5, whose approach should be multidisciplinary and focused on desertification and land use.

24. Although the launch of thematic programme networks (TPNs) within the framework of the RAP opens extended opportunities for the transfer of technology and knowledge within LAC, no concrete initiatives in this respect have yet come to light. It must be borne in mind of course that the process is new, having been approved at COP6, and requires technical and financial support for its implementation.
25. There is still a need to achieve an adequate and interactive balance between the advances made and the guidelines produced by the Convention’s CST, and the practical applications at subregional and regional level.

26. In the Caribbean subregion TPNs which are still under construction could potentially be implemented. In order to optimize them, however, improvements must be made in the communication of information and the capacities of users.

27. In Mesoamerica, while the access to technology and knowledge is given favourable coverage in the formulation of the NAPs and SRAP, in practice such access is limited and insufficient, considering that not even ministries (focal points) receive this kind of support. In this subregion the lack of any SRAP makes management at the international and even national level difficult and hampers access to technology and knowledge in areas of interest to the UNCCD.

28. In South America foundations have been laid for the introduction of NAPs in regional TPNs. Significant progress has been achieved with desertification indicators, more specifically with Monitor (developed for three countries with the support of the GEF and other agencies) and REDATAM indicator systems, and at national level with some cadastral and land use monitoring systems.

29. It is worth mentioning that Argentina is participating in the global LADA initiative, a methodological process that will be replicated worldwide and which is based on the GEF financing mechanism. In the first year pilot schemes were launched in three countries: Argentina, China and Senegal. Further pilot studies are due to be completed. One of these will be situated in areas of greater risk (“hot spots”), which are very exposed to degradation, and another in an area where the process of degradation has been reversed (“bright spot”).

30. In addition, there are major academic and research centres throughout the region specializing in arid zones and water resources, amongst other aspects related to the Convention. With a few exceptions, however, there is no direct linkage between these institutions on the one hand and national coordination bodies and ministerial focal points on the other, and there are no agreements, programmes or mechanisms for the transfer of technologies and knowledge.

31. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also for years been conducting research and studies, and they have systematized experiments involving the application either of alternative technologies and/or of new or traditional knowledge. This information is very scattered, however, and in many cases not easily accessible. So far there are no known initiatives in the LAC region for systematizing and transferring these technologies and knowledge.

32. The Puna and ChacoAmericano SRAPs have provided a means of developing a study-report on traditional knowledge in those ecoregions, which in the Puna case has been consolidated into a library on the subject containing nearly 2,000 volumes.
33. With regard to the exchange of information between national coordination centres, NGOs and financial bodies, it is worth recognizing the importance of the proper functioning of TPN-2, that is, the Desertification Information Network for the LAC region (DESELAC). It must be remembered that experience has shown that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are not enough by themselves to ensure information exchange. It is essential that users should be given the necessary capacity to achieve proficiency in computing and the use of the Internet and other techniques, which helps to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable populations.

34. It is therefore equally important to ensure experience exchange (especially South-South), the promotion of scientific research and the exchange of information between national coordination centres in the region.

35. It is worth emphasizing and strengthening initiatives such as the Africa-LAC Interregional Cooperation Platform, which was started in 1998 in Recife (Brazil) and which enabled the two regions to initiate a dialogue on cooperation and association building to combat desertification and drought by undertaking joint actions and strengthening their respective capacities.

36. The Platform has focused more especially on the adoption of measures aimed at strengthening national institutional and human capacities and at extending opportunities in terms of both quality and quantity in order to enable countries to share knowledge, exchange best practices and access financial and technical resources. The Fourth Forum of the Platform was held in Tunis at the end of November 2004 on the theme of “implementing the UNCCD through the promotion of sustainable agricultural farming systems”; the Forum adopted an operational work programme for the next two years based on three objectives: training; institutional policies and agreements; and resource mobilization and the establishment of partnership agreements.

IV. ADJUSTMENTS REQUIRED FOR THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PROGRAMMES

37. The Bonn Declaration, documented as decision 8/COP.4, expresses the concern of UNCCD country Parties regarding the state of implementation of the Convention. In this respect, the Declaration urges affected country Parties to finalize the preparation of their NAPs by the end of 2005.

38. The progress achieved with the preparation of NAPs has varied greatly. In the LAC region, for instance, 14 out of the 33 countries have adopted NAPs, while 15 are at various stages of preparation and the remaining four - all in the Caribbean subregion - have not yet started.
### NAP status in LAC countries: December 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>NAP implementation started</th>
<th>NAP adopted (date)</th>
<th>NAP final document ready (date)</th>
<th>Preparation of NAP draft started</th>
<th>Basic NAP guidelines</th>
<th>NAS process started</th>
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39. As may be noted from the table, apart from Cuba, which mainstreamed its NAP as part of its national sustainable development strategy, no other Caribbean country has completed its NAP. Some of the main reasons for the limited progress achieved with NAP preparation in the subregion are as follows:

- Objections to recognizing that desertification and land degradation are serious problems in the subregion at both national and subregional level;
– Delays in the holding of national awareness seminars;
– Lack of financial and technical resources dedicated to this task;
– Multiplicity of responsibilities borne by national focal points and constant changes in work teams;
– Insufficient awareness among stakeholders;
– Lack of research, as shown by the lack of relevant information on the subregion in regional databases;
– Lack of baseline data for establishing indicators and benchmarks;
– Lack of specialized equipment for the handling of data;
– Shortage of information available on sources of funding;
– Lack of integration or harmonization of current initiatives at national and regional level.

40. Except for Uruguay and Colombia, whose NAPs are in the course of preparation, the majority of South American countries, namely Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela, have adopted and initiated the implementation of their NAPs.

41. The countries that were the first to adopt their NAPs, such as Mexico (1994), Peru (1996), Bolivia (1996), Argentina (1997) and Chile (1997), are now aware of the need to update them regularly and to monitor the situation, so as to obtain a more accurate idea of the progress achieved in each country or region.

42. The more recently prepared NAPs, such as Paraguay’s, tend to follow the practice in current SRAPs - in Paraguay’s case the Chaco SRAP - and rely on decentralization processes to strengthen local governments. The Chaco SRAP (Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay) proposes to implement concrete projects that have a direct impact on the social, economic and environmental degradation of this area measuring 1 million km². The Puna Americana SRAP has in fact provided a useful tool for coordinating NAPs at subregional level. The Puna SRAP (Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru) aims to promote the sustainable development of the Puna region, by interlinking the NAPs of affected countries and increasing the awareness and participation of all the stakeholders involved in related processes. In addition, at the new stage of its NAP implementation, Chile will also aim to mainstream the fight against desertification in the development strategies of regional governments, as well as in local development plans.

43. An effort has been made to adapt NAPs in the region to national poverty reduction strategies wherever these exist - as in the case of Bolivia - or to integrate them within the countries’ other environmental and social policies. In Chile, the NAP was made part of the National Sustainable Development Policy and the National Biodiversity Strategy. In Colombia, the NAP is connected with four programmes, including the programme to reduce food insecurity and the programme for the efficient use of water, which in turn form part of the country’s
National Development Plan. Venezuela for its part has linked its NAP to Chapter IX of its Constitution, concerning Environmental Rights, and with a series of fundamental laws on the environment and territorial planning. The objectives of most NAPs are in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

44. Mesoamerica has undertaken to promote the development, formulation and validation of NAPs in countries that are still without, although this task has delayed the preparation and implementation of the SRAP for the subregion. It is worth mentioning, however, that the Hispaniola SRAP is making progress, achieving results in terms of subregional cooperation which could serve as a model for the Mesoamerica SRAP.

45. In countries already equipped with a NAP, institutional issues are among the major obstacles to a more satisfactory development of action programmes at all levels. There is a wide variety of arrangements with regard to the institutions hosting the Convention’s focal points, the legislation that applies to them, the way they are related to other relevant bodies; their technical, operational and political capacities, and the functions and attributes they rely on for inter-institutional coordination, among other aspects.

46. Management models typically reflect a fragmented approach, not only at national but also at subregional and regional level, leading to a dispersal of actions and a lack of linkage between UNCCD objectives and subregional goals. Although some subregions have launched subregional cooperation initiatives as a means of addressing their serious poverty problems, individual countries have yet to show a stronger commitment to overcoming the obstacles to better cooperation between them and between the different stakeholders within their borders.

V. PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN STRATEGIC AREAS OF THE BONN DECLARATION

47. The Bonn Declaration, contained in decision 8/COP.4, recognizes the need to enhance special efforts to combat and prevent desertification and/or mitigate the effects of drought during the decade 2001-2010. It also reaffirms, amongst others, the validity of the concepts and actions of Chapter 12 of Programme 21, and identifies the following strategic areas for action at all levels: sustainable land use management, including water, soil and vegetation in affected areas; development of sustainable agricultural and ranching production systems; development of new and renewable energy sources; launching of reforestation/afforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation programmes; development of early warning systems; and desertification monitoring and assessment.

48. These strategic areas were integrated within the LAC RAP, which was assessed, reviewed and updated at the ninth regional meeting held in Bogotá in June 2003, for the implementation period 2003-2007.

49. The LAC RAP, which is currently being developed and implemented, envisages five SRAPs, based on the application of the Convention to transnational ecosystems - Chaco-SRAP, Puna-SRAP, Hispaniola-SRAP, Caribbean-SRAP and Mesoamerica-SRAP - and the implementation of crosscutting programmes, with emphasis on poverty eradication, through six thematic programme networks:
– TPN-1: Identification and use of benchmarks and indicators of desertification and drought;
– TPN-2: Information exchange to combat desertification and drought (DESELAC),
– TPN-3: Integrated and efficient water resource management programmes;
– TPN-4: Promotion of agroforestry and poverty eradication;
– TPN-5: Improvement of best practices and traditional knowledge and technologies;
– TPN-6: Promotion of sustainable renewable energies.

50. Although the issues emphasized in the Bonn Declaration are fully reflected in NAPs, SRAPs and the RAP, the limited availability of financial resources (international, private and other) as well as the limited access to technologies, knowledge and experience are obstructing the country Parties’ wish to fulfil their commitments under the Bonn Declaration as speedily and rigorously as expected.

51. Even so, implementation of the LAC-RAP has made significant progress in recent months, with the launch in 2003 of TPN-1 on benchmarks and indicators, preceded by three subregional workshops on the same theme in Argentina, Honduras and Saint Lucia. Also in 2003 TPN-2 (DESELAC) was successfully launched during the above-mentioned ninth regional meeting. With regard to TPN-4 on agroforestry, an exchange of experience took place at an international technical seminar held in Peru in November 2003, based on pilot experiments in the Chaco and Puna Americana ecosystems; a binational workshop was held in the Dominican Republic, and TPN-4 was launched in Guatemala City in November 2004. TPN-3 on the integrated management of water resources was initiated in Venezuela in December 2004, following the holding of a technical workshop on international watersheds held in Caracas in 2001.

52. In the light of past experience gained with SRAPs, certain priority areas tend to stand out, such as: watershed management, reforestation, agroforestry, indicators, renewable energies, land and water conservation, early warning systems, adequate environmental education, traditional knowledge, and synergies. On this last theme, Mesoamerica, through the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, recently facilitated the organization of two workshops on synergies jointly with the technical focal points of United Nations Conventions, thus establishing a basis for addressing the issue at subregional and national level.

53. Although the proposal and launch of the Caribbean SRAP, planned for December 2004, have not yet taken place, there have been a number of initiatives in the subregion which are compatible with UNCCD objectives and which could provide a basis for the SRAP, such as: the Saint George’s Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability, the Fair Trade Bananas Regime, and the Good Agricultural Practices Project, all related to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and the Regional Project on Watershed Management in the Caribbean, headed by the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute. Additional steps towards
the realization of the Caribbean SRAP include the above-mentioned subregional workshop on indicators, held in Saint Lucia, and the subregional workshop on land degradation held in Trinidad in February 2004.

54. As far as progress in strategic areas of the Bonn Declaration are concerned, some countries have passed legislation to promote some of these areas, such as Chile, which has introduced decrees and laws on forestation and recovery of degraded soils in forest land, based on a budget allocation of US$ 24 million in 2003; on recovery of degraded soil in agricultural and stockbreeding land, with a budget of US$ 50 million in 2003; and on the promotion of irrigation in drylands, with a budget of US$ 26 million for that same year.

55. Furthermore, in countries that have only recently completed their NAP formulation, such as Colombia, some of the strategic areas were already covered by other agreements, such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), and bilateral reforestation projects in partnership with GTZ, IADB and others; monitoring and evaluation of desertification (Institute for Environmental Studies, based on national funding); and soil conservation (Autonomous Regional Corporations, using their own resources with matching national government funds). Efforts to obtain substantial funding for the development and implementation of these projects have not been so successful in practice, however, or those aimed at mobilizing new and additional funds from private and non-governmental sources, which brings us back to the problems mentioned in part I of this report.

VI. IMPROVEMENT OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES AND OF THE QUALITY AND FORMAT OF REPORTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

56. Decision 11/COP.1 established procedures for the communication of information, and for the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties, for the purpose of organizing and streamlining the communication of information, facilitating the regular review of implementation of the Convention, and promoting and facilitating the exchange of information on measures adopted by the Parties. The decision gave detailed and precise guidelines regarding the form and content of reports. Decision 1/COP.5 subsequently added more procedures, including the establishment of the CRIC, its mandate, thematic issues and methodology. The same problem was addressed again in decision 7/COP.6.

57. The quality of national reports depends to a great extent on their technical content, on evaluation systems established for the monitoring and follow-up of objectives, and especially on the discussion, analysis and validation of their content by all the interested stakeholders.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Mobilization and use of financial resources for the achievement of Convention objectives

58. To sum up, there is an urgent need to break new ground in identifying new financing sources and mechanisms, to extend existing ones with additional resources, to ensure the
ongoing training of focal points for the negotiation and financial monitoring of projects, and especially for access to GEF funding. This would make it possible to identify international resources for the implementation of projects and could open up new funding opportunities in the private sector.

59. In general, in order to ensure more efficient mobilization of resources available for UNCCD implementation by affected country Parties, it is recommended to:

(a) Develop regional resource mobilization strategies, such as:

- Promoting strategic partnerships between communities, local and national governments, and international cooperation agencies. For this national focal points will need to establish key contacts within and outside governments; to identify the convergence of national objectives and priorities with those of the NAPs; and to develop concrete agendas in order to arrive at a process of resource mobilization in the short term;

- Promoting regional consultation in globally important areas threatened by desertification and drought;

- Developing training facilities in the form of national, subregional and regional workshops for the formulation and successful presentation of GEF projects;

- Improving the dissemination of information concerning ways of accessing resources, chiefly under the GEF’s OP 15, which is the most recent and most closely related to UNCCD implementation resources;

- Exploring opportunities for the mobilization of private sector resources within the framework of Corporate Social Responsibility programmes, establishing a register and making contact with many foundations and associations active in this area within the region;

- Developing national funding schemes, such as payment for environmental services.

(b) Request national focal points to coordinate the submission of UNCCD priorities to the GEF Council and Assembly and to adjust mechanisms to the 1:3 ratio required between the GEF contribution and the co-financing to be identified by countries. In cases of land degradation the incremental cost is not easy to identify and even less to estimate. Moreover, due to the type of process employed for the approval of projects and the GEF terms used, countries have to resort to the services of significant numbers of external consultants, which drains off part of the funding.

(c) Urge country Parties to ensure that resource requirements to combat desertification are clearly given high priority in national development strategies and in international cooperation negotiations, amongst others.
(d) Request the COP to take a decision on the strengthening of regional programmes and, in this respect, to adopt a final decision concerning Regional Coordination Units, in order to activate the mobilization of resources, for example by initiating measures such as donor forums at regional level or monitoring the implementation of RAP priorities, subject to providing technical assistance in order to achieve better results in this area.

(e) At the political level, since the UNCCD was recognized at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development as an instrument for reducing poverty, countries could consider the possibility of supporting the mechanisms proposed by Presidents Lula of Brazil, Lagos of Chile and Chirac of France and Prime Minister Zapatero of Spain at the United Nations World Hunger Summit (September 2004), such as increasing development funding through taxes on the arms trade, or through a 0.01 per cent levy on the 1,000 million dollars generated by daily transnational financial transactions (the so-called “Tobin tax”).

B. Access to technology and knowledge

60. (a) Develop strategies to focus and coordinate efforts in this area;

(b) Create a support network by building partnerships between communities/local government and national/international cooperation, amongst others;

(c) Request the cooperation of CST members on the one hand to ensure the effective, interactive use of guidelines and recommendations generated within the Committee in order to apply them at the national, subregional and regional levels; and on the other hand to identify the academic and research centres which are of most relevance to the Convention, make contact with those institutions and establish formal links, such as exchange or cooperation agreements in the area of technology and/or knowledge transfer;

(d) Support the compilation of research and the systematization of relevant experiments conducted by NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) in the region, and propose technology and knowledge transfer mechanisms at regional and subregional level;

(e) Establish moderation and ongoing activation of the DESELAC network, so that it may carry out tasks such as:
   - Regularly collating, centralizing and systematizing information from countries and other sources with a view to its redistribution;
   - Promoting interactive spaces on the DESELAC web site, as well as forums and remote conferences on specific themes, and conducting regular polls;
   - Preparing and circulating a newsletter online in order to notify users of new information published on the web site;
   - Training government, NGO and other users to make better use of the system.

In order to render these tasks operational, agreements should be signed with focal points to ensure that the latter supply the necessary information on a regular basis.
(f) At regional, subregional, national and local level, optimizing access to technology and knowledge and promoting the exchange of experience and information requires:

- A willingness to cooperate on the part of developed countries and international financial institutions by providing financial support to promote scientific research and the training of technicians in thematic areas of special interest, such as early warning, water resources or agroforestry;

- Technical and financial support on the part of international financing bodies for the systematization, publication and dissemination of successful experiments in the application of new and traditional technologies;

- A final decision on the creation of Regional Coordination Units, so that they can contribute more effectively to information exchange tasks and experiments, the coordination of actions at subregional and regional level and the promotion of technical, scientific and technological cooperation;

- As a follow-up to decision 15/COP.6, a review of ways of rendering the CST more operational, more efficient and more effective, so that the Committee is able interactively to provide country Parties with scientific and technical advice, through the Regional Facilitation Programmes of the UNCCD’s secretariat.

C. Adjustments required for the preparation and implementation of action programmes

61. (a) An effective coordination, implementation and monitoring model is required in order to avoid the inefficient use of resources and to facilitate the achievement and maintenance of objectives, shared and assumed by the communities.

(b) In order to overcome problems of coordination between stakeholders, agencies and countries, there is a need to strengthen the managerial capacities of the focal points and national coordination bodies through the exchange of successful experiments carried out within countries and at subregional and regional level, and through ongoing training.

(c) At national level and between countries, there is a need to promote more cooperative work, thereby facilitating synergies and establishing strategic partnerships between institutions, non-governmental organizations, private companies and civil society, so as to reduce costs and channel efforts and resources in the same direction.

(d) In order to optimize NAP results, there is a need to undertake measures to stimulate inter-institutional cooperation and especially the coordination of actions. Such measures should be the outcome in particular of a harmonization of public policies aimed at the more efficient use of resources, more focused actions and better programme development.
(e) With regard to the internal coordination of the UNCCD, it is recommended that a final decision be taken to create Regional Coordination Units, trained to play an active role in monitoring the implementation of subregional and regional objectives.

(f) In order to attract more funding to the NAPs, the specific projects of these programmes should as a matter of high priority be incorporated in countries’ bilateral and multilateral cooperation agendas. Every action of NAPs, SRAPs and the RAP should be backed by a project which will help secure the funding required for its implementation. Action programmes at all levels should therefore maintain a portfolio of projects based on programme priorities.

(g) As a means of gathering more resources for the implementation of the Convention and supporting existing activities, it is worth identifying concrete problems in specific areas and then identifying implementation funds applied to those problems at governmental, national and local level. It would also be very useful to evaluate the economic losses brought about by desertification, or to quantify the opportunity cost of failing to take action in affected areas, since such arguments could stimulate strong awareness, thereby attracting investment from developed countries and the private sector.

D. Progress in strategic areas of the Bonn Declaration

62. In the opinion of some countries, a general work programme for the Convention should promote NAP priorities as the basic core of UNCCD implementation; according to others, it would be interesting in addition to develop initiatives focused, for example, on food security, which would include actions aimed at strengthening sustainable agriculture and soil improvement practices, or to hold demonstrations of successful national experiments which can be replicated at regional and subregional level.

E. Improvement of information communication procedures and of the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties

63. (a) Whenever countries report on the progress they have made with the implementation of the Convention, one of their weak points is the lack of technical working teams which, while engaged in supporting national coordination bodies, can find enough time, resources and effort to ensure the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the NAPs, SRAPs and RAP. Some subregions find it particularly difficult to gather and analyse information, even in some cases making use of information and communication technologies. This means that ongoing training is required for national focal points.

(b) In view of the financial constraints countries currently have to face when preparing such reports, funds should be more generously allocated and they should be looked upon as part of the enabling activities for which financial partners such as the GEF, GM and others have to make funds readily available. Country Parties could then apply a more coherent and sustainable approach to preparing their reports.
(c) Measures should be adopted in this respect to complete and improve TPN-2 (DESELAC), which should be fully operational as an interactive mechanism for the communication and exchange of scientific and technical, social and economic information among all the stakeholders involved in combating desertification, thus in effect helping to fulfil country Parties’ expectations with regard to a technological platform that effectively facilitates the flow of information for a very low cost. In practice, however, the operation of information networks such as DESELAC has not met those expectations and, as things stand at present, represents a challenge which UNCCD country Parties must meet by allocating additional resources to the secretariat in order to enable it to implement such networks and make them operational.

(d) On the other hand, the lack of financial and human resources when it comes to preparing public consultations soon enough to validate the approaches and contents of reports limits their quality, since most of them have not been subjected to in-depth discussion and review by the various stakeholders.

(e) It is essential to recognize the major role that the organizations of civil society can play in this respect, and to take steps to establish effective partnerships, by promoting wide-ranging, transparent, well informed and timely participative consultation procedures at all levels.

(f) Another key issue is the need to build up and apply a set of homogeneous management indicators. Generally speaking, although reports are of good quality and fairly complete, they tend to be presented more in the form of activity reports instead of offering an assessment of the progress achieved with the implementation of the Convention, pointing out accomplishments, challenges and lessons learned and in this way guiding countries towards the best courses of action from the point of view of implementing the Convention. There is a need to have clear, well defined national and subregional agreements with regard to the conceptual frameworks required for defining management indicators, in order to facilitate the evaluation of objectives and to render the report validation process more viable and more comparable over time.

(g) Furthermore, the content of reports should reflect a process rather than list individual activities, and the indicators and benchmarks used must measure development, as well as the progress accomplished with the implementation of the Convention in general. The advances already made with indicators in the course of projects undertaken in the region should as soon as possible be harmonized, transferred, adopted and applied in the preparation of national reports.

Notes


3 GEF Council Agenda Item 10, GEF/C.24/6, 19 October 2004 “Scope and Coherence of the Land Degradation Activities in the GEF”.
4 The GOE’s programme of work includes 28 themes, 10 of which were included in the plan of work for the 2003-2004 biennium. Among them were the following: desertification assessment, vulnerability (B&I), land conservation and rehabilitation (traditional knowledge and modern technology), poverty reduction and sustainable development in drylands, development of synergies with other initiatives. LAC countries are represented within the GOE with five members: two from Chile and one each from Argentina, Brazil and Cuba.

5 One example is the Avina Foundation, which operates in several countries at regional level. Another example in South America is the Chilean Minera Escondida Foundation.