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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS OF
AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES OF THE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION
ANNEX FOR THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The stage of advancement of national action programmes (NAPs) differs from one Northern Mediterranean country Party to another and the main concern in this respect is the legal status of, and support to, the national coordinating bodies and national focal points. Technical and financial assistance are important limiting factors in United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) implementation for non-European Union (EU) country Parties from the region. EU funding appears to be a vital asset in UNCCD implementation for the EU Annex IV country Parties, and the new focal area of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), covering land degradation, encourages Annex IV country Parties to promote integrated land-use planning within the context of their NAPs.

The potential and experience of affected developed Northern Mediterranean country Parties in various areas relating to land degradation and desertification legitimates their interest for exchange of technical experience with other affected developing and developed country Parties. Given the important role of facilitating communication between focal points at regional level for building up regional and interregional cooperation, innovative alternative scenarios could be explored for Europe under the UNCCD process in order to increase linkages between the scientific community and decision makers.

The Northern Mediterranean country Parties consider that national reports provide indispensable information regarding the status and dynamics of the UNCCD process and also serve as important elements in decision-making by potential partners. In this respect, comprehensive national reporting procedures should be supported by a system of data collection, quality indicators and monitoring and evaluation activities, while the format should cover all the requested information in a more accessible and efficient way, paying due attention to regional specificities.

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. This background document has been prepared with the aim of facilitating the participation of the Northern Mediterranean (NM) country Parties in the third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 3). While the focus of CRIC 3 will be on the review of the reports on implementation by affected African country Parties, including on the participatory process, and on experience gained and results achieved in the preparation and implementation of action programmes, several other agenda items will be considered, including review of the enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention (Bonn Declaration).

2. The document contains information on the implementation of the UNCCD in the affected NM country Parties in order to assist them during the regional consultations which will be held at the beginning of CRIC 3, and during consideration by CRIC 3 of the agenda items 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the provisional agenda. It compiles relevant information based on existing documentation, that is, national reports of 2000 and 2002 on the implementation of the UNCCD, as well as the synthesis and compilation prepared for the fourth Conference of the Parties (COP 4), the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) and the CRIC 1. It takes into account outcomes of regional and subregional meetings, national action programmes (NAPs) and other documentation available on the UNCCD web site <http://www.unccd.int> and its related links. Results of CRIC 2 and preliminary documents for CRIC 3 have also been considered. The list of all documentation is attached in an annex.

II. AGENDA ITEM 4: 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

A. Necessary adjustments to the formulation process and the implementation of NAPs according to the documentation submitted to the reporting and review processes

3. Following the above-mentioned documentation, three countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal) adopted their NAPs and are in the implementation phase. The other NM countries are progressing at varying speeds with the preparation of their NAPs; from the initiation stage (launch of awareness-raising campaigns, starting the establishment of national coordination bodies (NCBs)), through the medium stage (NCB set up, increasing research activity, organizing participation of main stakeholders, draft NAP), to the final version of the NAP, ready to be adopted. The following is extracted from the synthesis and the documentation.

4. The synthesis highlights the fact that in terms of its legal and administrative status, the NCB is less a legal entity and more a “coordination mechanism”. The NCBs are either part of ministerial bodies or fully decentralized administrative and political structures, using existing local bodies for coordination purposes. Therefore there is a need to develop or strengthen local committees to combat desertification to ensure NAP implementation at the local level. Most of the countries also recommend that the NCBs have a legal status and financial autonomy.

5. In the NM region, various national administration bodies, such as ministries of the environment, agriculture and forests, industry, together with ministries of planning, finance or foreign affairs, and, in most cases, representatives of the local administration participate in the NCBs. Technical and scientific bodies, meteorological services, national environmental protection agencies and universities are well represented (up to 50 per cent of NCB members) as well as, in some cases, non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is stated that this inter-sectoral and multidisciplinary character of the NCBs creates difficulties in communication between actors, the identification of priorities and decision-making, but it ensures the effective presence of all interests.

6. In general, NCBs have as their main objectives to push forward NAP implementation and to monitor and evaluate that implementation. The organization of NCBs is variable; the frequency of their regular meetings differs from regularly once a month to when the need arises; also, the NCBs' presidency varies from a fixed chairperson (designated by the minister of the ministry concerned) to rotation (annually) among the ministries involved.

7. In most NM countries there is no legislation focusing specifically on desertification. There are national plans, laws and other institutional rules dealing with sustainable development and rural development plans, environmental laws (such as laws to protect water resources, soil or forests), and territorial or sectoral-specific councils. NCBs aim to integrate all these provisions, in order to establish an integrated approach to combating desertification. Some countries also declare the relations with Agenda 21 and Local Agenda 21 initiatives. In general, there is a shared consensus on the need to improve national legislative and institutional desertification specific frameworks taking into account the integrations required.

8. During the NAP preparation processes, all the NM countries have integrated, or are in the process of integrating, desertification issues into existing laws, directives, ministerial orders and policies. NAP implementation implies both the continuous updating of these laws and, in some cases, the drafting and adoption of new laws. In some cases, provisions of the Convention have been successfully incorporated into other national programmes, strategies and policies that are conceived as priorities within the country, for example National Biodiversity Strategy, National Strategy for Water or National Development Plan. Furthermore, land degradation/desertification issues and measures have been integrated into national action plans such as local development plans and management plans for protected areas or watershed and coastal areas.

9. The important role played by European Union (EU) directives or frameworks is presented in the documentation as adding value to the NAPs of EU Member States (such as the EU Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC, the Common Agricultural Policy or the process for the establishment of a soil strategy). Official guidelines on good practice in agriculture or water use have been drawn up for local actors and national institutions.

10. It is also mentioned that for NM countries which have adopted their NAPs, there is a crucial need to have a legal framework for the NAPs. In some cases, NAPs are published as a Common Ministerial Decision, which gives instructions and recommendations to all institutions and governmental agencies concerned at the national and local level. One of the countries started implementation processes through pilot areas.

11. Taking into account documentation of the reporting and reviewing processes relating to NM countries, the NAP institutional processes should be sustained by improving and reinforcing the following:

- Communication and strong cooperation between all actors involved in preparing and implementing the NAP process and between all actors responsible for plans and programmes relating to combating desertification;
- Inter-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach at the administrative, political and technical levels;
- Awareness-raising at all levels: administrative, political and technical;
- The introduction of desertification topics on processes at the administrative, political and technical levels;
- The incorporation of local needs into the NAP process through strengthening a real participatory process and improving the relations between actors at national and local level;
- The capacity of the NCBs to be in line with the evolving NAP process, revising, if necessary, their mandate and tasks and strengthening their political support and commitment.

12. Information provided in particular from regional and subregional meetings also highlights the importance of activities raising awareness of desertification and land degradation. A good system of dissemination of the results achieved through the NAP process could improve the degree of priority accorded to the process by political and administrative authorities and by all other stakeholders involved. NM countries recognize that often decision makers and politicians do not perceive desertification as a national priority. They give more emphasis to sustainable development, land resources management, management of water resources and land use planning than they do to land degradation and desertification.

13. The implementation of the NAPs of EU NM countries is also linked to existing EU policies, among others the future European soil strategy. On the other hand, the European Commission should provide enabling European policies to support a strategic, coherent and coordinated approach to implementing the UNCCD at national and European level.

B. Implementation of the Bonn Declaration on the commitments to enhance implementation of the obligations of the Convention

1. Sustainable use and management of rangelands

14. Generally, little information on this topic is provided by the documentation on the reporting and review process. National reports declare that many countries which have adopted or drafted their NAPs realize the urgent need to make efforts in this regard, promoting studies and pilot activities aiming to improve knowledge on land with limited production factors. At the same time, damaged forest areas and pasture zones and activities for soil and water protection have been identified in many countries.

15. EU NM countries state that significant agro-environmental measures are in progress within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy. Projects on land degradation which are in development in most of the Annex IV affected country Parties could be

supported by building common NM criteria for evaluating progress and by the exchange of experience among different pilot areas and related experts. Moreover, in order to ensure a common NM strategy to incorporate NAP measures within the rural development plan, effective measures to disseminate codes of good agricultural practices should be encouraged. In addition, the involvement of the private sector should be promoted in order to enhance the projects on land degradation.

16. More information on sustainable use of rangelands is provided through various research projects developed by NM countries and financed by the European Commission as concerted action (CA). This is the case with the project GeoRange (Geomatics in the assessment and sustainable management of Mediterranean rangelands) which is based on a thorough assessment of range conditions through satellite data, the identification of physical and socio-economic factors and the design and implementation of rangelands management scenarios. Another CA is SCAPE (Soil conservation and protection strategies for Europe), which aims to establish a platform for EU Member States to implement a sustainable multifunctional soil conservation and protection policy and to provide scientific support to EU Member States to incorporate soil conservation and protection into the EU Policy for Sustainable Development.

17. The UNCCD Activity Master for NM, developed by the UNCCD secretariat in 2002 and 2003 and based on a questionnaire sent to NM country Parties, indicates that a large number of NM country Parties need and offer cooperation and exchange on the subject of control of overgrazing/stock levels and rangelands management, in particular on the reinforcement of technology/know-how/expertise, training and capacity building, materials and documentation, exchanges and scientific networking. It was one of the selected areas of activity to be discussed at the regional meeting to strengthen cooperation among NM country Parties in the field of land resources management which took place in Bonn, Germany, on 17-18 May 2004. Turkey proposed the organization of a regional technical workshop to exchange experience on the control of overgrazing/stock levels and rangelands management in the NM region. Greece proposed an institution for housing a regional training centre (RTC) for NM on the same topic.

2. Reforestation/afforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation

18. Starting in the first and continuing in the second reporting cycle, most of the countries stated that significant measures which had already been taken in the sector of forest resources management and forest fire control and protection, together in some cases with an effort towards reforestation plans, are considered crucial to combating desertification. These actions include activities relating to the preparation or updating of national inventory systems, sustainable forest management, protection against illegal land-use changes, the development of early warning and monitoring systems, including remote sensing methods, and reforestation and afforestation programmes. Research activities are also mentioned for the development of knowledge bases as well as for early warning systems for forest fire prevention. Reforestation, afforestation and forest monitoring activities are in line with the aim of NAPs and in some countries are contained as an integral part of NAPs, together with soil conservation and restoration activities.

19. More information on the issue of reforestation/afforestation programmes and the intensification of soil conservation programmes is provided through various research projects developed by NM countries and financed by the European Commission as CA. This is the case with two projects: RECONDES (Conditions for restoration and mitigation in desertified areas using vegetation) which addresses processes for the mitigation of desertification in the NM by the means of innovative techniques using vegetation in specific landscape configurations prone to severe degradation processes, and REACTION (Restoration actions to combat desertification in the Northern Mediterranean) which aims among other things to establish a database on land restoration as well as to provide restoration guidelines for NM through the evaluation and transfer of technologies in order to facilitate access to high-quality information for, *inter alia*, forest managers, policy makers and stakeholders.

20. The UNCCD Activity Master for NM shows that a number of NM countries need and offer cooperation and exchange on the matter of reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in affected areas and soil conservation strategies/planning, in particular on the reinforcement of technology/know-how/expertise, training and capacity building, materials and documentation, exchanges and scientific networking. Reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in affected areas, sustainable forest strategies, monitoring of deforestation/destruction of vegetation cover, forest fire monitoring and control, soil conservation strategies/planning, rehabilitation techniques for degraded soil and sustainable traditional techniques of soil fertility/top soil conservation represent several of the selected areas of activity to be discussed at regional level.

21. Reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in affected areas and soil conservation strategies/planning were two of the eight priority areas adopted for scientific cooperation at the regional meeting in Bonn, Germany, 17-18 May 2004, to strengthen cooperation among NM countries in the field of land resources management. In addition, several proposals were made at this meeting: Albania proposed an institution to host a regional thematic network (RTN) on the issue of soil conservation strategies/planning; Greece and Spain proposed the organization of a regional technical workshop on the topic of reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in affected areas; Spain proposed one of its institutions to host a RTC on soil conservation strategies/planning; Turkey proposed institutions to host one RTC on soil conservation strategies/planning and one RTC on reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in affected areas.

3. Desertification monitoring and assessment

22. During the first reporting cycle, many of the NM focal points declared no access to specific information or databases on desertification, which are indispensable for NAPs. In addition, the databases of national institutions and organizations at regional level use different standards and formats. Although all countries of this region state that they are very much interested in benchmarks and indicators and that they propose a number of impact and implementation indicators, none of them was reported as being used in the first reporting cycle. Some affected European countries are also relying on the DPSIR system of indicators (Driving Forces, Pressures, State, Impacts, Responses) and adapting them to their own situation, following the guidelines on environmental monitoring systems provided by the European Environmental Agency. Some countries also utilized conventional indicators on desertification (ESAs).

23. In the second reporting cycle, desertification monitoring and assessment activities have been much improved. The documentation illustrates how several countries have already established their own national databases of information on monitoring desertification and drought and are also participating in the setting up of a Mediterranean database. The experimental use of indicators in projects at national level or in pilot areas results in the preparation of desertification sensitivity or risk maps at national and local levels. With increased involvement of the scientific community in NAP preparation and implementation, more information is provided on measures to monitor and assess drought and desertification in the NAP process. But the documentation also indicates that continuity of monitoring and assessment of drought and/or desertification depends on the availability of financial resources in the future. Most countries make use of training in Geographical Information System (GIS) and remote sensing. Several countries have followed suggestions made at the fourth and fifth sessions of the COP for incorporating more socio-economic indicators into their desertification risk scenarios. Finally, most countries are continuing their work on benchmarks and indicators.

24. More information on the subject of the monitoring and assessment of land degradation and desertification processes is provided through various research projects involving NM countries and financed by the European Commission as CA. This is the case with several projects: MEDACTION (Policies for land use to combat desertification) which adopts an integrated, multidisciplinary approach involving social and natural scientists together with the main stakeholders in NM to develop land-use change scenarios, policies and sustainable management strategies to address and mitigate specific problems of land degradation/desertification/sustainable development; DESERTLINKS (Combating desertification in Mediterranean Europe linking science with stakeholders) is a European interdisciplinary research project for a common methodology for identifying and using indicators for desertification and producing a Desertification Indicator System for Mediterranean European countries; LADAMER (Land degradation assessment in Mediterranean Europe) contributes to the protection of the natural environment through the production of a regional land degradation map for Mediterranean Member States of the EU and any other material relevant for planners and political agents. In the information provided from regional and subregional activities in the NM, several outcomes can also be found on the issue of desertification monitoring and assessment; the planned European soil monitoring system developed within the framework of the European soil strategy will also include a set of parameters on desertification and land degradation which will concern the EU NM countries preparing or implementing a NAP; a number of risk and diagnosis maps were produced by DESERTNET, a project carried out by a number of Italian administrative regions together with some Spanish regions and funded by the European Commission in the framework of the INTERREG Programme with the aim of supporting local administrations in improving their specific knowledge of desertification at the local level.

25. The UNCCD Activity Master for NM shows that most countries are interested in the development of monitoring and assessment activities, technical and scientific exchanges and cooperation, and training and capacity building. In particular, benchmark indicators for soil degradation/soil type mapping and monitoring, mapping and inventory of land use, desertification risk maps and definition of regional indicators for land degradation and desertification have been indicated as sectors for possible cooperation.

26. Among the conclusions of a technical workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans within the context of the UNCCD, held in Romania in October 2004, it was decided to establish a drought management centre in the subregion. The activities of the centre should later be expanded to the whole area of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and close cooperation should be established with the NM drought mitigation activities, creating a European drought monitoring and mitigation system.

C. Update on the ratification process and NAP, subregional action programme (SRAP) and regional action programme (RAP) processes based on existing information as well as on subregional and regional information

27. Since CRIC 1, no further country has adopted its NAP. Serbia and Montenegro is the only country from both the NM and CEE which is not yet Party to the Convention. The documentation provided by the first and second reporting processes is already out of date (eight NM countries submitted national reports). It is expected that the next reporting process devoted to regions other than Africa in 2006 will give more updated information on the status of the implementation of the UNCCD at national level in affected NM countries. Some countries of southern Europe, being both NM and CEE countries, are following the regional processes of both Annex IV and Annex V (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia).

28. After the Convention entered into force, a regional working group of the then affected country Parties of Annex IV was created, involving reporting members responsible for the implementation of the UNCCD at national level (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey). Portugal in 1997/end 1998, Italy in 1999/June 2001, Greece in June 2001/end 2002 and currently Turkey (since end 2002) have successively chaired the Group of Annex IV after Spain in 1995/1996. Under each Presidency, one or two meetings of focal points of the Group of Annex IV were held, as well as up to one ministerial meeting; these meetings took place either in the country of the Presidency or in parallel with a COP or a CRIC. Various specific thematic/scientific meetings involving the above-mentioned focal points of NM country Parties were also held during the same period. Some non-affected Parties were observers to the Group of Annex IV, including the European Community, France and Monaco. Israel was also invited as an observer to the Annex IV process.

29. The terms of reference (TOR) of a RAP covering the then affected countries of the Group of Annex IV were adopted at ministerial level on 16 June 2000 in Murcia, Spain. In the meantime, more affected NM countries became Parties to the UNCCD. At the meeting held in Athens, Greece, in 2001, the then five members of the Group of Annex IV (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey) expressed their wish to continue working together as a group. Since this did not involve the most recent NM Annex IV country Parties, it was decided to rename the working group the Subgroup of Annex IV. Therefore the TOR of their RAP was renamed the TOR of a SRAP in order to refer to their work at subregional level.

30. Some new country Parties of the Annex IV, namely Croatia, Cyprus and Malta, requested the assistance of the UNCCD secretariat in facilitating the establishment of a regional process involving all countries from the NM region. The UNCCD secretariat, therefore, in cooperation with the Greek Presidency of the Subgroup of Annex IV, organized, in parallel to a meeting preparatory to CRIC 1, the First regional consultative meeting of affected Northern Mediterranean country Parties (Annex IV) in Geneva, Switzerland, in July

2002. The UNCCD secretariat played the role of a facilitator by interacting with the interested Parties of Annex IV and analysing their suggestions on scientific and technical cooperation.

31. Pursuant to the request formulated at the above-mentioned meeting, the UNCCD secretariat distributed a questionnaire to eleven NM country Parties at the end of 2002 and in 2003 to explore the potential areas and forms of future regional cooperation. After two workshops of Annex IV focal points, an Activity Master for NM countries was prepared to give a clear and synoptic overview of the needs and offers indicated by the countries on regional cooperation and exchange.

32. The above-mentioned five country Parties (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey) worked together with the intention of harmonizing their activities, collaborating in the preparation of a RAP, fostering pilot projects and setting up information networks. TOR for the compilation of the RAP were defined and approved. It was agreed that priority should be given to the establishment of a subregional Clearing House Mechanism (CHM), now actually in progress with the CLEMDES project, and to the creation of a subregional network of pilot areas in each country, thereby securing cooperation and the exchange of information and experience. Activities of the Subregional group have concentrated on the planning of subregional cooperation and the acquisition of relevant information.

33. The activities of this group of country Parties were also concentrated on the establishment of a subregional CHM through the CA CLEMDES funded with European Commission funds; the elaboration of a subregional network of pilot areas in each country, thereby securing cooperation and exchange of information and experience, and the participation of the focal points in the project MEDRAP (Concerted action to support the Northern Mediterranean action programme to combat desertification) also funded with European Commission funds. This project aimed through a series of workshops involving various key actors and stakeholders to share experience of the NAP process by providing technical and scientific contributions to focal points for the formulation of an effective SRAP.

34. Interregional level activities exist between the NM and North Africa as well as between the NM and CEE countries. The DISMED project (Desertification information systems to support national action programmes in the Mediterranean) was initiated by Italy in cooperation with the UNCCD secretariat to improve the capacity of the national administrations of Mediterranean countries and to provide a common information system to monitor the physical and socio-economic conditions of areas at risk, and also the extent of severity of, and trend of, land degradation for the Mediterranean (NM and Northern African countries). The process of interregional cooperation between Annex IV and Annex V countries has also been launched, during a back-to-back preparatory meeting for CRIC 1 held in Geneva in 2002, where countries expressed their interest in it. Finally, a workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans within the context of the UNCCD, at which some country Parties which belong to both Annex IV and Annex V have participated, took place in Poiana Brasov, Romania, from 25 to 26 October 2004.

III. AGENDA ITEM 5: 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 (GEF) AND THE GLOBAL MECHANISM (GM) AND ITS FACILITATION COMMITTEE

35. As contained in reporting and review process documentation for COPs and CRICs, all NM countries declare that land degradation and desertification is often not perceived as a priority problem in their country and thus no financial resources are allocated to measures and actions to mitigate desertification, and there are no specific budgets for the implementation of the Convention. Countries stress their difficulties in mobilizing domestic funding specifically relating to desertification issues, in particular funding necessary to prepare and implement NAPs and related actions, such as activities relating to local capacity building, awareness and dissemination of information and monitoring and assessment of desertification and drought. One way of addressing this problem is to integrate land degradation/erosion/desertification issues into other action plans and programmes that are on the priority list of the country, such as a national rural development plan. Most financial resources come from the general budget of the ministries dealing with desertification (ministries of the environment, forestry or agriculture) or from the budget of other ministries, local agencies and government institutions.

36. Non-EU countries from the NM which cannot rely on the Government for the provision of finances to implement the Convention and prepare NAPs, underline the urgent need for external financial mechanisms and indicate that their NAP activities are funded mainly by international organizations or programmes, including the GEF. Some countries are experimenting with the implementation of small-scale pilot projects in pilot areas that require fewer funds in order to stimulate the allocation of adequate financial resources. One country mentions the support and cooperation offered by other NM affected countries.

37. In addition, information provided by the reporting process shows that European Commission funding, such as the Structural Funds, are of strategic importance to assist some EU countries in their NAP implementation. Many projects involving several EU NM countries have received funding under the various Framework Research Programmes and Environmental Action Programmes of the European Commission. Partnership agreements were formalized between the five countries working together at subregional level. At interregional level, the Euro-Mediterranean partnership is also supporting policies and measures in the Mediterranean region.

38. With the addition of Cyprus, Malta, and Slovenia to the EU, the NM region now includes seven affected EU countries: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

**IV. AGENDA ITEM 6: 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**

A. Relevant information according to the reporting and review processes

39. As stated in the information provided for the first reporting cycle, many affected developed country Parties express an interest in exchanging technical experience with other affected country Parties, both developing and developed. NM country Parties emphasize the importance of national research activities and also the need both for application of the results obtained and for further scientific and technical cooperation. But despite efforts in technology promotion and increased funding, research shows that desertification and land degradation are still progressing in some areas; in addition, during recent years the phenomenon has been further aggravated by recurrent drought conditions.

40. The documentation based on the second reporting cycle mentions that at national and local levels the conditions of access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how depend on the stage of implementation of the Convention, national scientific capacities and adequate financial resources of the beneficiary. Several NM country Parties reported that they had identified and used traditional knowledge, such as traditional techniques for growing olive trees, the protection of ancient terraces and the rehabilitation of old irrigation systems. Networking among scientific institutions, the establishment of operational early warning systems on drought and soil moisture, the exchange of data and the comparison of activities carried out at varying geographic scales should be improved, together with better coordination and sharing of relevant information and data at local, national, subregional and regional levels.

41. An acute or chronic shortage of financial resources in some affected countries limits access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how. Financial resources are also required for disseminating scientific output to end-users.

B. Relevant information regarding subregional, regional and interregional activities

42. Countries working as a group at subregional level participate on a regular basis in numerous activities and events organized as part of the various European Commission funded projects. They have arranged the exchange of information, views and experience among their focal points, their scientists and various stakeholders. The MEDRAP project was a particular example of such an exchange of know-how and experience. Under the CA funded by the EC, they are currently inviting as many focal points from other countries of Annex IV (i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia) as possible to their meetings and to the preparatory discussions for future proposals.

43. As one of its main priorities, the above-mentioned Subregional group was actively involved in the implementation of the project CLEMDES to set up a NM Internet portal linked with a network of national CHMs. This aims to increase the accessibility of

information for the Annex IV country Parties and the sharing via Internet of existing knowledge on the issue of desertification for the Mediterranean region.

44. With regard to affected countries of the EU, the final report of the working group on erosion/task group on desertification within the framework of the European Soil Strategy recommends cooperation between European organizations to promote joint programmes with technology transfer and to develop pilot research projects on soil degradation processes and on mitigation measures.

45. At the NM regional level, the UNCCD was requested to interact with NM countries to analyse their suggestions on scientific and technical cooperation. The secretariat took the initiative to compile a questionnaire which was divided into thematic sectors, taking a holistic approach to land management (agriculture, soil, forestry/agro-forestry, water management and so on). Each sector was divided into a number of smaller areas of activities taking into account the complexity of the sector. The NM country Parties were requested to indicate for each area of activities what they could “offer” and what were their “needs”. This information was arranged under four main pillars of experience sharing in which they would be ready/interested to participate:

- First pillar: Scientific cooperation and networking
- Second pillar: Technology, know-how and expertise
- Third pillar: Training and capacity building
- Fourth pillar: Materials, documentation and publications

46. Based on the results of the questionnaire (activities undertaken between the end of 2002 and during 2003), the UNCCD secretariat compiled a first tool for facilitating cooperation and exchange between NM countries within the framework of the implementation of the UNCCD. Ten individual regional cooperation kits were established (one for each NM country). Each individual kit provides for each area a correlation between the specific “needs” expressed by the country Party and the potential “offers” expressed by other NM country Parties. National focal points are using the kits to promote national discussions in their ministries/institutions concerned, with a view to developing bilateral exchanges with relevant interested partners in other Annex IV country Parties.

47. The UNCCD secretariat also compiled a second tool called Activity Master. This document contains all the results of the questionnaire, processed and rearranged to give an easy and quick overview of the individual countries’ potential “offers” and “needs” under the four pillars. These two tools provide useful information for the specific needs expressed by each country Party and encourage exchange between focal points, experts, NGOs and so on of other country Parties. It fosters discussion and exchange at national and bilateral levels and it facilitates regional cooperation on land degradation and land resources management between interested countries. Moreover, at a regional level these tools serve as a frame for exchange between country Parties, a basis for discussion of concrete ideas in future regional meetings and a pool of information on options for future cooperation among NM country Parties.

48. Various further steps were undertaken between the end of 2003 and during 2004 by the UNCCD secretariat to facilitate the process of identification by NM country Parties of concrete action associated with their potential “offers” under the four above-mentioned pillars. At the regional meeting to strengthen cooperation among NM country Parties in the

field of land resource management, held in Bonn, Germany, in May 2004, several participating country Parties made concrete proposals such as:

- To offer one of their institutions to host a NM RTN on a selected area;
- To organize a NM technical workshop on technology, expertise and know-how in a selected area;
- To use one of their existing training institutions in a selected area to become a NM RTC;
- To use one of their existing documentation centres in a specific area to become a NM regional reference centre (RRC).

Consolidated lists of areas in which NM country Parties would be ready to host a RTN, RTC or RRC or to organize a technical workshop were established and can be found in the conclusions of the meeting on the UNCCD website. TOR for a RTN, a RTC and a RRC were also discussed and adopted. The country Parties which made these propositions have been requested to elaborate on them further.

49. Priorities adopted at the meeting in Bonn for NM regional scientific cooperation are the following:

- Reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in affected areas
- Water erosion control/preventive measures
- Sustainable agricultural policies
- Control of overgrazing/stock levels/rangelands
- Soil conservation strategies/planning
- Sustainable forest strategy
- Sustainable water management
- Sustainable traditional techniques/methods in water saving/conservation

50. International organizations participating at the meeting in Bonn, such as the *Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Méditerranéennes* (CIHEAM), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) expressed their willingness to cooperate and contribute towards regional activities (networking, training in land resources management, and so on).

51. Within this framework, as a first concrete outcome of the meeting in Bonn and as a contribution to the regional process under the second pillar, technical workshop, Italy invited the NM focal points to the following meetings:

- International conference: DESERTNET for UNCCD implementation in Annex IV, held in Alghero, Italy, from 30 September to 2 October 2004;
- International symposium on forest fires, held in Reggio Calabria, Italy, from 24 to 25 November 2004.

52. A technical workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans within the context of the UNCCD was held in Romania in October 2004. It involved for the first time the participation of national focal points, national meteorologists and national experts working on the problem of drought. Among the conclusions of the workshop, it was decided to establish

a drought management centre in the subregion, the activities of the centre should be expanded later to the whole area of CEE, and close cooperation should be established with the NM drought mitigation activities, creating a European drought monitoring and mitigation system.

V. AGENDA ITEM 7: CONSIDERATION OF WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPROVING PROCEDURES FOR COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION, AS WELL AS THE QUALITY AND FORMAT OF REPORTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE COP

A. Relevant information according to the reporting and review processes

53. Following the information contained in synthesis documents as well national reports produced for the first reporting cycle, many affected developed country Parties expressed their interest, as a part of reporting process, in exchanging technical experience with other affected country Parties, both developing and developed. The Help Guide for affected country Parties of regions other than Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean should also be reviewed to reflect the specific needs of the country Parties in these regions.

54. Information also indicated that country Parties consider national reports to be indispensable information regarding the state and dynamics of the UNCCD process and also serve as important elements in decision-making by potential partners. Hence, the need further to improve the quality of national reports was recognized, for example by avoiding lacunas and repetitions, avoiding mixing actions already implemented with those still planned, or avoiding providing insufficient information on important subjects such as science and technology. Consistent compliance with a common format would also be an asset to the reporting process. The involvement of NGOs in the assessment of progress was welcomed and should be facilitated in order to ensure a more representative assessment of national efforts to implement the Convention.

B. Relevant information regarding subregional, regional and interregional activities

55. Other international treaties, such as the Barcelona Convention, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), or international institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), request intensive reporting activities. The documents produced in these frameworks are useful instruments and better cooperation might be required.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND EMERGING TRENDS

56. Regarding the formulation process and the implementation of NAPs, the main concerns of NM country Parties are to give legal status and back-up to the NCBs, the NAPs and the focal points. This point might be raised in general discussion at CRIC 3.

57. Some NM country Parties require technical and financial assistance for elaborating NAPs at bilateral or multilateral levels and cooperation between Annex IV EU countries and non-EU countries might be a good example of intra-regional cooperation.

58. The concept and approach of implementing the NAP on a pilot area basis proved valuable in the NM region and the exchange of experience should be encouraged and discussed with other regions at CRIC 3.

59. Innovative propositions should be developed in relation to the NCBs to overcome the difficulty of dialogue between all relevant national and local stakeholders in the NM due to the complexity of the political and administrative structure of national and local institutions and to the difficulties of coordinating the multi-sectoral interests. It would be useful to discuss successful experience from other regions at CRIC 3.

60. The stage of advancement of the NAPs differs from one country to another, due in particular to the fact that some countries acceded to the Convention only recently. Therefore it is a bigger challenge for the regional process to aim to harmonize, complete and increase the efficiency of various NAPs. SRAPs and RAPs could effectively be better formulated when each country has adopted its own NAP. Despite many efforts on the part of the UNCCD secretariat and the focal points of Annex IV, more experience sharing in connection with the implementation of the NAP could be promoted and sustained with a view to harmonization of NAPs. Regional meetings are needed, as they are one important opportunity of doing this.

61. Other international obligations or programmes, to which NM country Parties have contracted or in which they are participating (EU, OECD, Euro-Mediterranean partnership, Mediterranean Action Plan and so on) should constitute an important opportunity for cooperation in action.

62. Accumulated knowledge on drought and desertification in Europe is considerable but the results of research often fail to be passed on and absorbed by planners and decision makers. Innovative alternative scenarios for Europe could be explored under the UNCCD process to increase linkages and communication between the scientific community and decision makers.

63. Even if the activities of the NM countries relating to Committee on Science and Technology (CST) decisions, such as the rehabilitation of degraded land, early warning systems for mitigating the effect of drought, and drought and desertification monitoring and assessment, have been much improved, there is still a need for better integration of the CST recommendations into UNCCD national processes. At CRIC 3 the question of integration of CST decisions is one issue to be discussed in exchanging experience on the various approaches taken.

64. The integration of land degradation and desertification issues into other plans/programmes proved to be successful for some NM countries and there is a good involvement of the scientific community in NAP preparation and implementation. Networking among scientific institutions and the exchange of data at the national and European levels are being further developed, in particular through the use of the UNCCD Activity Master for NM country Parties on land degradation.

65. Interesting experience from NM country Parties relating to sustainable use and management of rangelands, reforestation/afforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation, as well as desertification monitoring and assessment, should be brought to the attention of other participants in CRIC discussion on these topics.

66. Funding issues appear to be a crucial point; all country Parties declare the challenge of mobilizing domestic funding for combating desertification, in particular for NAP implementation. External funding also seems to be for non-EU countries an important constraint factor in starting implementation of the UNCCD. Meanwhile, EU funding appears as a vital asset for EU Annex IV countries in the implementation of the UNCCD. Programmes funded by the European Commission are definitely a good framework for ensuring communication, exchange and interaction between focal points at regional and subregional levels. In this regard, the linkage between the general provisions of the UNCCD, including those of its fourth annex, and the EU Soil Strategy will have to be considered.

67. The establishment of a focal area within the GEF embracing efforts to combat land degradation, particularly desertification and deforestation, constitutes a powerful means of encouraging country Parties to promote, within the context of the NAPs, integrated and participatory planning of land use. In this context, Annex IV affected country Parties could have an opportunity through promoting partnership projects, and also within the framework of the other international agencies' programmes.

68. Each country Party of the NM has potential and experience in various areas relating to land degradation and desertification. Each country Party has institutions and/or is involved in implementing projects to combat land degradation/desertification. They may wish to share their experience, know-how and expertise with other countries of the NM which may need relevant assistance. The development of scientific cooperation can be organized between researchers who may be working on the same topics in the region. Some NM country Parties may have training experience and facilities (centres, trainers and/or pedagogical materials) which might be used for launching regional training programmes as an instrument of regional capacity building. Finally, documentation, publications and media products prepared at the national level might also be shared between NM country Parties. In this way the role of the UNCCD secretariat has become important in facilitating communication between focal points at a regional level for building up regional cooperation among NM country Parties and also the interregional collaboration process.

69. The national reporting format should cover all requested information in a more accessible and efficient way, oriented regionally without increasing the workload of country Parties too much. There is an urgent need to develop the use of impact indicators to check on the progress of NAP implementation. Comprehensive national reporting procedures should be supported by a system of data collection, quality indicators, and monitoring and evaluation actions.

Annex

LIST OF DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

| <u>Document symbol</u> | <u>Title or description</u> |
|------------------------|---|
| COP 4/AHWG | |
| ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.3(A) | Compilation of summaries of reports submitted by Northern Mediterranean and other affected country Parties |
| ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.3(B) | Synthesis of information contained in national reports from Northern Mediterranean and other affected country Parties |
| ICCD/COP(4)/AHWG/6 | Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group to the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties |
| ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.4 | Synthesis of reports submitted by developed country Parties |
| ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.5 | Review of information provided by relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations System as well as IGOs and NGOs |
| ICCD/COP(4)/CST/5 | Synthesis of scientific and technical information, particularly with regard to the benchmarks and indicators used to measure progress, and assessment thereof, contained in the reports received from country Parties for consideration by the CST |
| COP 5 | |
| ICCD/COP(5)/3/Add.1 | Consideration of additional procedures or institutional mechanisms to assist the COP in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention |
| CRIC 1 | |
| ICCD/CRIC(1)/5/Add.1 | Synthesis and preliminary analysis of information contained in reports submitted by Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties, and progress made in the formulation and implementation of subregional and regional action programmes in the Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe and other affected country Parties |
| ICCD/CRIC(1)/5/Add.2 | Compilation of Summaries of reports submitted by Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties |

| <u>Document symbol</u> | <u>Title or description</u> |
|---|--|
| ICCD/CRIC(1)/5/Add.3 | Inputs from the regional meeting of Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties |
| ICCD/CRIC(1)/6/Add.1 | Synthesis of reports submitted by developed country Parties |
| | CRIC 2 |
| ICCD/CRIC(2)/2 | Overall review of the activities of the secretariat and of progress made by affected country Parties in implementation of the Convention |
| ICCD/CRIC(2)/3 | Review of the report on enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention |
| ICCD/CRIC(2)/4 | Global Mechanism - Review of the report on activities of the Global Mechanism, and the provision of guidance to it |
| ICCD/CRIC(2)/5 | Global Mechanism - Review of the policies, operational modalities and activities of the Global Mechanism, and the provision of guidance to it |
| ICCD/CRIC(2)/6 | Review of available information regarding the financing of the Convention, implementation by multilateral agencies and institutions, including information on the activities of the Global Environment Facility concerning desertification |
| | CRIC 3 |
| ICCD/CRIC(3)/INF.3 | National reporting process of affected country Parties. Explanatory note and help guide |
| ICCD/CRIC(3)/INF.4 | National reporting process of developed country Parties. Explanatory note. |
| | SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTIVITIES |
| | Activity Master 2003 on NM cooperation on land resources management |
| Report of the meeting and letter of follow-up | Regional meeting for strengthening the cooperation among Northern Mediterranean countries in the field of land resources management, Bonn, Germany, May 2004 |
| Report | Technical workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans within the context of the UNCCD, Poiana Brasov, Romania, 25-26 October 2004 |

NM NATIONAL REPORTS

Albania (2002)
Cyprus (2002)
Greece (2000/2002)
Italy (2000/2002)
Malta (2002)
Portugal (2000/2002)
Spain (2000/2002)
Turkey (2000/2002)

DEVELOPED PARTIES REPORTS MENTIONING NM

European Community (2000/2002)

NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

Greece (2001)
Italy (2000)
Portugal (2000)

OTHER DOCUMENTS AND WEBSITES

GM/UNCCD joint work programme 2004-2005 and GM website
GEF website including the Technical Advisory Group
Relevant pages from European Commission website (europa.eu.int)
Websites of concerted action programmes (CLEMDES, MEDRAP, DESERTLINKS, GEORANGE, LADAMER, MEDACTION, REACTION, SCAPE, RECONDES) or other projects (DESERTNET)

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