



UNITED  
NATIONS



**Convention to Combat  
Desertification**

Distr.  
GENERAL

ICCD/CRIC(5)/2/Add.1  
14 December 2006

Original: ENGLISH

---

COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION  
Fifth session  
Buenos Aires, 12–21 March 2007  
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda

**REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION AND OF  
ITS INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 22,  
PARAGRAPH 2 (a) AND (b), AND ARTICLE 26 OF THE CONVENTION,  
AS WELL AS DECISION 1/COP.5, PARAGRAPH 10**

**REVIEW OF THE REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFECTED COUNTRY  
PARTIES OF REGIONS OTHER THAN AFRICA, INCLUDING ON THE  
PARTICIPATORY PROCESS, AND ON EXPERIENCE GAINED  
AND RESULTS ACHIEVED IN THE PREPARATION AND  
IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PROGRAMMES**

**Review of reports on implementation by affected Asian country Parties, including  
on the participatory process, and on experience gained and results achieved  
in the preparation and implementation of action programmes**

Note by the secretariat

Addendum

**Synthesis and preliminary analysis of information contained in reports  
submitted by affected Asian country Parties**

**Summary**

1. The process of preparation for the third series of national reports under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in the Asia region followed a participatory approach as in the past. The Asian and Pacific country Parties transmitted to the UNCCD secretariat 39 national reports on the implementation of the Convention, reflecting the progress they have made in the implementation of the Convention. This document contains a

synthesis and a preliminary analysis of the national reports transmitted under the third reporting cycle.

2. Ten years after the Convention came into effect, most Asian and Pacific country Parties reaffirmed their resolve to address land degradation and desertification issues, as manifested by their efforts to devise planning frameworks and implement desertification and land degradation control strategies. These efforts were further bolstered by positioning desertification strategies in the broader context of sustainable development – establishing links with the global compact of meeting the Millennium Development Goals, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and national development strategies relating, in particular, to poverty alleviation, decentralization, food security, and environmental sustainability.

3. The progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention in the Asia region indicates that although many countries had their national action programmes (NAPs) validated several years ago, programming and implementation challenges persist. The barriers to progress have been the same as reported to previous meetings of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC): difficulties in mobilizing financial resources needed for the implementation of NAPs, inadequate capacities of institutions, and unsynchronized efforts from stakeholders are examples of reasons cited for the disjointed efforts. Mainstreaming and integrating the NAPs into the development process have not actually helped in stressing the importance of the NAPs and hence their implementation. Identified priorities reflected in the NAPs remain unfunded. The inclusion of desertification and land degradation in the Global Environment Facility (GEF) portfolio was a boost to the global objective of combating desertification. But still the funding challenges for NAP implementation remain daunting. Further support should be extended to affected developing country Parties of the region in the implementation of their NAPs by reviewing the current policies, systems and procedures that can facilitate access to the development funds, including those of the GEF. Lack of funding is the major obstacle to wider promotion and effective implementation of the NAPs.

4. At the local level, however, capabilities of grass-roots communities are progressively growing. This progress needs to be continued, so as to give the communities, which are the direct stakeholders of the Convention, direct help in the rational management of natural resources.

CONTENTS

|  | <u>Paragraphs</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------------|-------------|
| I. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL REPORTS AND EMERGING TRENDS.....   | 1 – 13            | 4           |
| II. SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS.....  | 14 – 55           | 6           |
| A. Participatory processes involving civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations .....                       | 14 – 20           | 6           |
| B. Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements .....  | 21 – 25           | 7           |
| C. Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusion of partnership agreements .....                 | 26 – 33           | 8           |
| D. Links and synergy with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies.....                         | 34 – 37           | 10          |
| E. Sustainable land-use management, including water, soil and vegetation in affected areas .....   | 38 – 39           | 11          |
| F. Development of sustainable agriculture and ranching production systems .....  | 40 – 42           | 11          |
| G. Development of new and renewable energy sources .....   | 43                | 12          |
| H. Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought.....                     | 44 – 48           | 12          |
| I. Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment.....  | 49 – 53           | 13          |
| J. Access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how ..... | 54 – 55           | 14          |
| III. LESSONS LEARNED .....   | 56 – 69           | 14          |
| A. Lessons learned from the process of preparation and implementation of national action programmes .....  | 56 – 65           | 14          |
| B. Lessons learned from the reporting system .....   | 66 – 69           | 16          |
| IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....  | 70                | 16          |

## I. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL REPORTS AND EMERGING TRENDS

1. Given the social, economic, political and geographical diversity of the Asia region, the context of desertification within the UNCCD framework has also widened covering different aspects of land degradation. Although desertification is a serious environmental concern among Parties in the region that are within the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid zones, in particular countries in Central Asia, West Asia, parts of South Asia and north-east Asia, drought and land degradation (deforestation, land degradation due to flooding, soil and water erosion, and conversion of land for urban expansion) are also prominent issues in the humid tropics, in countries that have fragile mountain ecosystems, and in the small island developing States (SIDS), specifically in South-East Asia, parts of South Asia and the Pacific. The diversity of the region has also led to different actions for addressing desertification, drought and land degradation issues, as reflected in their national reports and national action programmes (NAPs).

2. From their current efforts, Asian and Pacific country Parties have actually achieved positive, albeit modest, gains. The progress made is not sufficient to reverse the trends, but several of the desertification control initiatives that have been implemented merit full credit for having produced encouraging and, in some, inspiring results. However, for many of the initiatives the challenges for expanding and up-scaling successful efforts remain formidable, thus limiting the potential impacts of the interventions.

3. Efforts made in the context of NAP preparation appear to have not always helped create the right impetus for expanding efforts to combat land degradation, despite the high level of motivation of those involved. One reason for this is that only limited opportunities are available in terms of external support for NAP implementation. Equally important is that the NAP process underscores internal changes needed to improve the effectiveness of strategies designed to combat land degradation.

4. Many Parties have taken steps to mainstream their NAPs into their macroeconomic planning. Indeed almost all the countries have formulated development strategies and planning frameworks that place land degradation and desertification control in the broader context of sustainable development as committed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002. The UNCCD has actively encouraged Parties to support this process of establishing strong links with the programming of country targets for attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and reacting to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and other national development strategies. The responses by Asian and Pacific country Parties vary considerably depending largely on the capacity of institutions to mobilize support for such efforts. Some Parties have been successful in connecting their NAPs with the formulation of their respective MDGs and/or PRSPs. Other Parties are still in the process of establishing such links.

5. However, the mainstreaming process may be causing some unintended effect of undermining the NAP process. Some reports imply that, in the course of integrating the NAPs, the process has instead become an adjunct to the national development strategies and although NAPs conform to the objectives of PRSPs and other broader frameworks, funding for actual implementation of NAP priorities has remained elusive. As a result, the funds needed to support the NAPs have not been forthcoming; this runs counter to the spirit and intent of the Convention for giving importance to the formulation of the NAPs.

6. As envisioned, the establishment of national coordinating bodies (NCBs) and national focal points (NFPs) could in many ways have provided an avenue for addressing the NAP implementation issues. Despite the creation of such bodies in some countries, the problems of effectively implementing the NAPs persist. In some countries, the mechanisms and arrangements for coordinating the various sectoral policies are still inadequate. Some countries have reported that their NCBs function on an ad hoc basis with no certainty as to what specific mandate they are to perform in the long term. Only a few countries have been able to provide operational mechanisms to guide policies at the national level and the goals of actions taken at the local level.

7. For all the difficulties the NCBs and NFPs have encountered, the efforts of these structures to strictly adhere to the functions suggested by the Convention merit full acknowledgement. Similarly, within the context of the political and social structure of the Parties, the NCBs and NFPs have exerted laudable efforts to be as inclusive as possible, opening participation from critical stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and civil society as a whole to ensure the effective implementation of the NAPs.

8. The reports show that Parties have been embarking on numerous projects dealing with desertification control and land degradation issues with funding support from external donor agencies and locally mobilized resources. The scope and breadth of the projects are wide and diverse, covering interventions that address policy reforms in the key sectors responsible for managing natural resources (forestry, agriculture, water and environment), institutional capacity development, research and development, and direct investments in local areas. The nature of the projects varies; some are area-specific and have a single objective of natural resources rehabilitation (reforestation and afforestation projects and rangeland management); others have many stakeholders and multiple objectives (watershed management, improving agricultural production, natural resources rehabilitation with biodiversity conservation). Some Parties have reported that the interventions designed are within the ambit of the NAP and the UNCCD framework, but most have indicated that the projects pursued are not driven by the NAP but are under the general framework of sustainable development and national development strategies. Some of the projects also deal with improving governance through decentralization which involves local communities and civil society in the implementation.

9. With assistance from donor institutions, some countries are working to devise “synergetic” strategies to preserve biological diversity and combat land degradation. Similarly, and until recently, there have also been initiatives linking land degradation with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in particular, the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol in the context of the clean development mechanism.

10. In the current series of reports, the role of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) figures prominently. With the inclusion of desertification and land degradation in the GEF portfolio as operational programme 15 (OP 15), interest by Parties in accessing the GEF has grown considerably. Within the context of OP 15 sustainable land management has become the umbrella programme for the Convention. Although the portfolio is newly established, access to the GEF by Parties has had mixed success, as many encounter procedural and policy constraints in accessing the mechanism.

11. Parties have consistently recognized the valuable role of the scientific and academic communities in efforts to combat desertification and land degradation. It is to the credit of these communities that despite the chronic budgetary constraints and limited technical capacities under which their institutions operate, these groups continue to actively provide technical and scientific support to decision makers, field level implementors and communities by providing relevant information to users and documenting knowledge on controlling desertification and arresting land degradation.

12. Capacity development and participatory approaches have played a major role in the current progress of countries in their efforts to comply with the provisions of the Convention. Since the initiation of the NAP process in a number of the country Parties, capacity-building has started to result in sufficient critical mass to support the process. An important aspect of the capacity-building initiatives is that it benefits not only national institutions but more importantly local level entities such as communities, NGOs, and specific stakeholders such as women, marginal communities and young people which have become advocates of the NAP process.

13. The country profiles submitted by more than half of the Parties provide important information on the biophysical and socio-economic indicators of countries. This is a welcome development, but it is also clear that the quality of the data needs to be further enhanced, underscoring the need to improve monitoring systems for land degradation and desertification. Data on the biophysical indicators of desertification and drought contained in the reports are scanty. In contrast, the socio-economic data are quite solid. Clearly, there is a need to balance the reporting of the profile, which should link the economic data with the biophysical changes. Only through this relationship can one gather more critical information that should be helpful to decision makers and the COP.

## **II. SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS**

### **A. Participatory processes involving civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations**

14. The current reports reconfirm the critical importance of participatory approaches as a fundamental element in meeting the objectives of the Convention. Parties pursue the principle by engaging in a continuous dialogue among the various participants, exchanging information and sharing knowledge, and supporting partnership and synergy of efforts undertaken at various levels.

15. The level of involvement by civil society participants in the NAP process depends largely on their proven track record as an organization and their abilities to reflect their concerns in the process. The reports record a low level of involvement, in particular by women, pastoralists, CBOs and young people. In contrast, the contribution made by NGOs is considered significant in several countries. It is noted that the reports of the Pacific island States stress that the concerns of indigenous people about land degradation and the development process should be properly addressed.

16. The importance countries attach to capacity-building of NGOs has been highlighted in the framework of NAP implementation. In this context, workshops, forums and other capacity

development initiatives have been organized to raise the level of technical know-how of stakeholders with a view to promoting a sense of ownership of action programmes formulated.

17. Similarly, most of the reports emphasized the efforts made on public information and awareness, through the use of media, forums, conferences and workshops at different levels (subregional, national and local). Particularly noted is the increasing local involvement in the UNCCD process as a result of information and awareness activities undertaken by government institutions and NGOs working at the local level.

18. The reports made scant mention of involvement by the private sector, primarily because arid and semi-arid zones are still perceived as areas not lucrative enough for the private sector to invest in. A few countries have reported that they have invited the private sector to take part in the NAP discussions. However, there is no indication of the extent to which the private sector has committed to participation in the NAP formulation and implementation processes.

19. Most of the Parties have acknowledged the crucial role the scientific and academic communities play in the effort to combat desertification and land degradation. A large number of countries have been able to mobilize the active support of this sector through their ongoing technical research programmes and studies, compilation of information and knowledge (including traditional and indigenous knowledge) on appropriate technologies for arresting desertification and land degradation, and documenting best practices. This is despite the fact that many of the scientific and academic institutions also face chronic budgetary and capacity constraints that impede their abilities to effectively deliver on their mandates. Notwithstanding the limited funding, research activities in forest management, soil and water conservation, and appropriate agricultural practices in dryland and degraded areas are perceived to contribute considerably to the continuing effort to combat desertification. Most of the Parties have reiterated their previous call for more assistance in strengthening their research agenda for combating desertification.

20. Although the current reports can draw information on the level of civil society participation in the UNCCD process, they do not give precise information on the approaches which guarantee the quality of involvement by civil society and also ensure the sustainability of its participation in the process.

#### B. Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements

21. At CRIC 1 it was reported that almost all of the Parties have set up their NCBs. Since then some Parties have stated that they have elevated the status of their NCBs to higher levels of governance which signifies the degree of commitment of their government to combating desertification and land degradation. A number of countries reported that their NCBs have been attached to the office of the Prime Minister. Other country Parties have expanded the membership of the NCB to include other ministries and sectors found to be critical to the implementation of their NAPs. One Party has included the banking and financial sector to ensure that bank lending policies would take into account the needs of the affected sectors. Another Party reported that its NCB has been incorporated in a subregional initiative for addressing land management. One Party reported that the current structure of its NCB is being reviewed and support has been obtained from a donor institution which will strengthen and elevate the NCB to a higher level of decision-making.

22. Some Parties have been assessing and restructuring the set-up of their NCBs. Most of the NCBs that have retained their original configuration were attached to a particular line ministry or department (e.g. environment, agriculture or water). Although the Parties have not cited any coordination problems under such an arrangement, in such cases the priorities of the host sectoral agency take precedence in the implementation over the priority activities of the NAP.

23. Funding available for the operation of the NCBs varies widely. Some Parties reported that separate and specific allocations have been made to support the operation of the body. Others have reported that the operational funds are taken within the budgetary allocations granted to the respective line ministries. One Party pointed out that because its NCB and NFP are under one line ministry, their funding was dependent on whatever the line agency can allocate to support the operation of the body. A few Parties have also reported that augmentation funds have been obtained from external donor countries and institutions to support the coordinating body.

24. Almost all of the Parties have reported in the past that appropriate laws relating to natural resources and land management are in place. The majority of these laws and legislative frameworks (which dealt with land tenure and land use, agriculture and grazing, forestry, water use and conservation, environmental protection, environmental management, environmental impact assessments, mining and mineral resources, zoning, urban development, etc.) were enacted prior to the entry into force of the Convention. A few Parties have stated that some laws were enacted recently but not necessarily as a result of the Convention. Some Parties also reported that they are in the process of reviewing their current legislative frameworks with a view to making them more consistent with the current situation. Many Parties have identified gaps in their present legislation and acknowledge the need for revision to strengthen its force. Two Parties, however, reported that they are yet to establish the appropriate institutional and legislative framework for economic and sustainable development, following the recent resolution of political conflicts that they have experienced in the past decade.

25. The current thrust of the Parties that are leaning towards greater decentralization has created an impetus for greater involvement of local governments and communities, reinforcing the call of the Convention to create an environment that enables wider participation. This direction can be viewed positively, especially in the context of the future progress of NAP implementation.

C. Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international,  
including conclusion of partnership agreements

26. In almost all reports the Parties of the region have reiterated their need to mobilize adequate and sufficient resources to support the NAP formulation and implementation processes. Most of the countries, having completed the NAP preparation, have actively embarked on the development of partnerships and the search for financial resources, particularly from international aid partners, but with mixed results, often obtaining only insufficient technical assistance and financial support. Some Parties, particularly the Pacific SIDs, have been relying substantially on donor aid to support their national development process.

27. Although these are the expected steps following the NAP completion, the efforts have not led to greater prominence of the NAP in the overall development process. In certain cases the unexpected effect of mainstreaming the NAPs into other sustainable development strategies was to de-emphasize the importance of the NAP as the basis for resource programming and mobilization and instead to bolster the sectoral orientation of the assistance given to Parties. Although this pattern was not explicitly mentioned in the reports, it is manifested in the types and kinds of projects (specifically for projects that entail huge investments) that were approved for funding. One report also notes the preferences of donor agencies for programmes and projects which they helped to develop, rather than for the identified priority projects under the NAP.

28. The support provided by the Global Mechanism (GM) is mentioned in many reports as being instrumental in jump-starting the NAP, the subregional action programme (SRAP) and the regional action programme (RAP) processes. The GM thus was reported as providing resources, although limited, to cover the organization of consultations, workshops and conferences, and in raising awareness of the Convention. The Central Asian subregion was reported to have benefited from a multidonor consultation that developed into a large-scale funding scheme supported by the GEF. Although an assessment of the implementation of the Central Asian Country Initiative for Land Management (CACILM) is still pending, other subregions and the majority of the Asian and Pacific countries have received less attention for partnership building initiatives at subregional and/or regional scale.

29. Within the context of the GEF OP 15, sustainable land management has become the umbrella programme for the Convention. The assistance requested by the Parties varies widely; some have submitted projects for the Project Development Fund-A (PDF-A) block and some have also submitted proposals under the MSP and full-sized project (FSP) categories. Some Parties have been able to avail themselves of GEF funds to support capacity-building projects for the Convention. Several countries have been able to receive GEF support to implement subregional and regional initiatives to address land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. One Party reported having just finalized the arrangements for a country pilot partnership. Many countries have reported that they have prepared stand-alone project proposals on land degradation. These projects are still to be assessed.

30. Although the GEF portfolio has been recently established, access to the GEF by Parties has had mixed success. To gain access to GEF funding Parties need to develop project proposals that follow the strict guidelines and formats issued by the GEF for all types of projects (i.e. the PDF-A, MSPs and FSPs), but many Parties do not have the capability to do this. This is made more complex by the fact that the project proposals must be endorsed by the GEF focal point and need to attract the attention of the implementing agencies for submission to the GEF. Dialogue with GEF implementing agencies could enhance the understanding of the GEF procedures and facilitate project development at national, subregional and regional levels. The long processing of project proposals dampens the interest of Parties in pursuing viable initiatives eligible for GEF financing.

31. In addition to support from the GEF, almost all countries of the region were able to obtain international assistance to support land degradation projects, albeit not explicitly for UNCCD implementation. Some of the funded projects were not necessarily included in the NAPs but were identified under the countries' sectoral priority thrusts. Most of these projects

were supported under bilateral programmes that deal with capacity development of institutions (ranging from enhancing capacities for strengthening policy formulation capabilities to investments in improving monitoring and assessment capabilities), direct support to local initiatives, and strengthening of research capacities. Projects and programmes that entail huge capital investments (such as reforestation and afforestation, watershed rehabilitation, sustainable agricultural production and rangeland management) are supported by multilateral funding agencies.

32. Some Parties of the region are exploring other partnership arrangements, particularly involving the private sector, to mobilize resources in support of the action programmes. Although this approach appears to have considerable potential, the reports have not provided sufficient information and adequate indicators on how the countries will actually measure progress under this arrangement.

33. It is also noted that certain Parties of the region have made efforts to mobilize domestic resources in support of NAP implementation. One Party has explored the setting up of trust funds and the imposition of taxes to generate sufficient funds to support desertification control and avert land degradation. This reflection of commitment should be picked up by the aid partners in expanding their support to the Parties.

D. Links and synergy with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate,  
with national development strategies

34. Many Parties referred to efforts made to harmonize their desertification and land degradation control strategies with the national development thrust, Agenda 21 and sustainable development strategies,<sup>1</sup> especially because, following the 2002 WSSD, countries were called upon to re-commit themselves to pursuing the MDGs.

35. The international community also needs to acknowledge the synergy between NAPs and poverty alleviation strategies (as defined in the PRSPs). Many countries of the region have frequently mentioned, in their reports, integrating these strategic approaches with little or no possibility for increasing the funding opportunities for NAPs.

36. There is a compelling justification for NAPs to be given the prominence they deserve by elevating the document as a basis for programming decisions and hence resource mobilization efforts. Most countries are moving towards incorporating the NAPs into their respective national development agendas, sustainable development strategies, the attainment of the MDGs and the pursuit of their PRSPs, but the NAPs should not in any way be subsumed under these strategies – they should be treated as complementary efforts to synergize the development directions, especially in areas where desertification and land degradation are critical concerns.

37. Some reports continue to acknowledge the strong links between the UNCCD and the two other Rio Conventions and that their concerted implementation is vital to the genuine attainment of sustainable development. This recognition has prompted actions to operationalize the synergy among the conventions at the policy and ground level. The GEF support for the conduct of the national capacity self assessment (NCSA) exercise was welcomed by several Parties. The

---

<sup>1</sup> See document ICCD/CRIC(1)/3/Add.1, paragraph 52.

NCSA, which seeks to determine the level of capacity of Parties for ensuring that the three Rio Conventions are effectively implemented, bolstered the efforts of involved institutions to work closely. Apart from the seminars and workshops that were supported by the NCSA, it also enabled the institutions to identify priority areas for capacity development in conjunction with the various national strategies developed to comply with the respective conventions (i.e. the national biodiversity strategic action programme for biodiversity; NAPs for desertification; and the national adaptation programmes of action under the UNFCCC).

E. Sustainable land-use management, including water, soil and vegetation in affected areas

38. One notable development that has followed the inclusion by the GEF of land degradation as one of its portfolio areas, is the increased number of Parties that have realigned their strategies along the lines of the sustainable land management (SLM) programmes. Most countries of the region reported that they have developed project proposals within the ambit of SLM. Most of the interventions are directed towards addressing unsustainable agricultural practices, overgrazing and rangeland degradation, and deforestation. The range of assistance identified also covers the entire spectrum of development, from strengthening existing legislative frameworks that govern the use of natural resources, and capacity development of institutions to implement initiatives relating to effective sustainable land and land-use management, to specific projects that directly rehabilitate degraded areas. The components of the interventions are also wide-ranging, covering improvement of agricultural production in marginal agricultural areas, soil conservation through the application of practices to prevent soil erosion, water conservation through the efficient use of irrigation and the widespread application of rainwater harvesting, forest rehabilitation, and plantation of shelterbelts for protection from dust- and sandstorms.

39. Some reports have also stated that urbanization through the expansion of urban areas to agricultural areas is also a factor contributing to land degradation. Some reports from SIDS mentioned that urban activities have created a different set of environmental problems such as solid waste, conversion of limited agricultural areas and the destruction of coastal zones, all of which threaten already fragile ecosystems.

F. Development of sustainable agriculture and ranching production systems

40. Parties in the region are fully aware of the magnitude of the land degradation problems, especially in agricultural and grazing areas. As this issue is at the core of alleviating poverty in marginalized rural areas, many have initiated measures that would respond to this concern. A complementary development that is influencing the situation is the ongoing economic reform leading towards more market-oriented economies, which several Parties are also pursuing.

41. The reforms adopted vary from major structural policy changes in agriculture, land tenure and promotion of agricultural trade to designing specific project initiatives that address agriculture and rangeland issues. More specifically, the initiatives were aimed at promoting sustainable use and management of rangelands including the promotion of secure livelihoods in the pastoral livestock sector, support through research programmes on effective stockbreeding of pasture animals, and the balanced offering of incentives and disincentives aimed at reducing the number of herders in pasturelands.

42. The land-tenure system has been identified as a critical issue in the entire strategy of combating desertification in agricultural areas, as it recognizes land ownership by local communities. A number of reports mentioned that pursuing land-tenure reforms would greatly improve agricultural production in these areas. Where private sector involvement is appropriate, certain Parties have allowed its participation in the programmes.

#### G. Development of new and renewable energy sources

43. In only a few reports were desertification control initiatives correlated with the development of new and renewable energy sources. Although some countries have identified new and renewable energy as outstanding concerns in their development thrusts, a direct relationship between the NAP and energy development has not been explicitly established. This is in contrast to the Africa region, where new and renewable energy is a primary concern and its importance is highlighted as one of the thematic areas for regional cooperation. Parties in the Asia region may have to take the necessary steps to give special attention to this aspect in the next round of reporting or in bringing this concern to the regional level.

#### H. Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought

44. Several aspects covered in this section have already been addressed, notably in sections III.E, III.F and III.G above. Nonetheless, this item has been treated in many different ways in the country reports, which is to be expected, given the prevailing conditions in the countries of the region. Some reports do not provide sufficient information on the matter, whereas others provide detailed discussions on the various measures taken. In general, this section covers many areas whose scope includes the legislative actions taken, developing and implementing specific projects on critical sectors that relate to combating desertification, and the setting up of support systems for promoting actions that will arrest desertification and mitigate the effects of drought.

45. The most commonly cited and important initiatives referred to in the reports include reforestation, rehabilitation of degraded lands, soil conservation and protection of lowlands, establishment of shelterbelts in wind-prone areas, agroforestry, improving grazing lands, and disaster management, all with the objective of sustainable management of natural resources.

46. In response to the scarcity of water resources, several countries have drawn up strategies for the preservation of underground water, which is subject to heavy demand resulting from rapid urbanization and the expansion of farming. Several country Parties have applied water harvesting techniques, the construction of infiltration wells and mulching to retain water in farmed areas.

47. Some efforts are being made to link land-degradation control initiatives to the search for alternative forms of energy. Agroforestry and forestry plantations using jathropa as the main crop are being expanded with the end view of expanding the biofuel alternative. One country reported that the promotion of alternative fuels is high on its agenda of action to arrest further land degradation.

48. Some reports have tried to explore the possibility of linking their measures with the clean development mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol by supporting reforestation and agroforestry initiatives and water conservation.

#### I. Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment

49. One of the key objectives of the NAP is to institutionalize procedures and systems that can monitor changes in the physical condition of areas that are affected by desertification and land degradation. Almost all Parties of the region have long recognized the importance of monitoring and assessment systems to help their decision makers and local communities choose appropriate actions to avert possible impacts of drought and, in the long term, desertification and land degradation.

50. Most of the reporting countries have highlighted that the monitoring and evaluation component is critical to their overall strategy of combating desertification and they have therefore provided resources that will strengthen their capabilities in this area. However, the degree of progress made in setting up such systems varies greatly. Similarly, the outcomes differ from country to country, because of varying approaches and characteristics specific to the contexts in which the countries are evolving. Some countries have built capacity for permanent monitoring and evaluation systems; others, however, have practically no workable system to undertake the task. Monitoring and assessment are contingent on the support of the NAP. If funds are not made available to implement the NAP, then monitoring and evaluation cannot be undertaken effectively.

51. Some Parties have stated that they received assistance for institutional strengthening and capacity development for monitoring and assessment. Some have reported that they are currently making an inventory of degraded lands and areas that are severely affected by desertification. Others have linked their desertification and monitoring systems with social indicators, to keep track of the impacts of the degradation of natural resources on the well-being of the communities that are dependent on those resources.

52. Few Parties have mentioned the regional thematic programme network on desertification monitoring and assessment. This signifies that more efforts are needed to promote the network, and more resources will have to be mobilized to expand the activities of the network so that more countries can benefit from its existence.

53. Currently a mass of information is available, often very substantial, but many constraints stand in the way of making meaningful progress towards attaining an integrated framework for monitoring and assessing the environment. For example, although much information is available that would be useful for such an activity, technical people often lack the skills to apply it. Other constraints include varying benchmark indicators among countries and even among the institutions within a country; overlapping mandates of institutions that have jurisdiction in collating natural, climatological and environmental information; compartmentalization of agencies which possess information; scattered locations of data; and a host of other problems that impede the development of capacities for monitoring and evaluation.

J. Access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how

54. No reports have dealt extensively with access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how. Instead the reports identified a number of projects which seek to apply, on a wider scale, proven approaches and technologies that will address desertification and land degradation. Some countries reported testing or experimenting with some technologies which have the potential for arresting desertification. Such technologies were generally focused on improving the productivity of agricultural lands, particularly in desertified areas, on water conservation and on some aspects of improving the effectiveness of agroforestry.

55. Most of the countries identified agricultural research as crucial to the success of their NAPs; raising the productivity of cropping systems and ensuring the sustainability of agriculture is crucial to their entire strategy. Some countries have paid special attention to irrigation and soil reclamation, others have reiterated the need to focus on developing agroforestry, and yet others are trying to raise the productivity and quality of forest products.

### III. LESSONS LEARNED

A. Lessons learned from the process of preparation and implementation of national action programmes

56. In their reports, Parties of the region have fully recognized the importance of the NAP formulation and implementation process. The inclusion of combating desertification and land degradation into the GEF portfolio was a turning point for Parties in the Asia region to realize that NAPs are not just commitments under the Convention, but are the building blocks of an internationally recognized environmental strategy.

57. The continuing emphasis by Parties on NAP formulation and implementation highlights the importance accorded to participatory approaches. Not only has the process ensured legitimacy of the action programmes wherein support can be mobilized from the participating sectors, but it has also warranted greater transparency.

58. There is an emerging concern which pertains to ensuring the sustained participation of the critical stakeholders and improving the quality of their involvement. The reports highlighted that sustained and effective involvement of all stakeholders entails important costs and funding needs. In some countries the strategy for securing this involvement is constrained by the way which the NCBs operate. In addition, the NCBs have not fully tapped the potentials of their scientific and academic communities. This situation could account in part for the shortcomings noted in the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) relating to early warning and the harnessing of local knowledge in activities to combat land degradation.

59. The processes initiated as part of UNCCD implementation have raised awareness of and mobilized stakeholders involved in desertification control. Perhaps the biggest influence of the NAP is its continuing emphasis on the reiterative nature of the process. Although indirectly, this aspect of the NAP has prompted some Parties to review and re-assess their legislative

frameworks that impinge on desertification control and address land-degradation issues. One important result from the NAP process is that it provides an opportunity to look at new legislation in cooperation with involved line ministries.

60. Assessing progress on the implementation of the NAPs, particularly for those countries that developed their NAPs several years ago, is a cumbersome exercise. Many Parties still encounter serious challenges in NAP implementation. The problems cited are manifold, and usually relate to difficulties of mobilizing financial resources (both internal and external), inadequate institutional capacities, overlap of framework laws, and lack of support from other sectors critical to the success of the NAPs. One positive experience which the NAP highlighted is that Parties now recognize that the NAP is a dynamic iterative process which needs to be periodically reviewed and updated. As such some countries have now updated, or are in the process of updating, their NAPs to account for key developments and realities on the ground.

61. Special attention is given to least developed countries (LDCs) and SIDSs not only by developed country Parties but by the entire donor community. The needs of these countries are huge and their environmental conditions are in dire shape. So donor and development partners need to develop a tailored aid system that can be launched immediately.

62. The recognition of the need to integrate the NAPs with the MDGs, PRSPs and other national sustainable development strategies has grown considerably since the second reporting cycle. This integration process needs to be continuously promoted. An emerging concern, however, is that NAPs may be undermined in the process of integrating them with the other strategies. Parties of the region need to reiterate the relevance of the NAP in the context of sustainable development as a programming tool and means for resource mobilization. It should not be subsumed under some of the sectoral priorities but should be viewed as a unifying document that should facilitate the programming of actions for the various sectors involved in desertification control and arresting land degradation.

63. Access to GEF funding for combating desertification and land degradation was a welcome development. However, countries are still experiencing persistent difficulties in mobilizing financial resources for the implementation of action programmes. Some Parties continue to point out the reluctance by developed countries to support the new projects and programmes set out in the NAPs. In this context, the countries in the region face the dual challenge of mobilizing substantial domestic resources and prompting the developed countries to provide effective support to UNCCD implementation initiatives in the affected countries. The funding expected from the GEF would effectively complement the efforts made at those two levels.

64. One development in the area of monitoring and assessment that should be encouraging to affected Parties in the region is the increasing accessibility and lowering of costs for obtaining information that can be used for natural resources monitoring. The free flow of information through the Internet, and access to satellite imaging using this medium, is also opening up immense opportunities for sharing information and data at practically no cost.

65. The development leaning towards greater decentralization of the NAP process is one area that needs to be supported by the NAP process. The value of decentralization in the NAP implementation cannot be overemphasized. Not only does the process warrant greater

transparency but it also transfers greater accountability to the major stakeholders for the actions. This framework provides the necessary impetus for pursuing the NAPs in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. Decentralization also bestows a sense of ownership of NAPs resulting from effective participation by local and grass-roots communities. But this process can only be optimal if steps are taken to strengthen their capabilities.

#### B. Lessons learned from the reporting system

66. The analytical matrix as prescribed in the Help Guide was adequate to extract information on the status and progress of UNCCD implementation at the local, national and subregional levels. The use of a single framework based on the same topics facilitated the synthesis and preliminary analysis of the reports and the evaluation of the results achieved.

67. Some Parties did not strictly follow the structure suggested by the Help Guide. This could be due to the insufficiency of information and the different priorities of the countries concerned. On the other hand, the information gaps also reflect differences among the institutions involved in the implementation of desertification control initiatives.

68. Country profiles are an important section of the national reports. By providing data and statistics on the biophysical and socio-economic indicators, they would enable the COP to gauge the impact of desertification on the natural environment and on the living conditions of the people living in the affected areas. But the information supplied is of varying value and in its current form cannot be used to assess the relationship between the degradation of natural resources and the economic well-being of the countries. Even so, this information does need to be compiled and consolidated, and it could serve as a basis for updating in the next round of reporting.

69. The national reports still remain descriptive and are not really analytical. The reports concentrated on describing the activities carried out, rather than focusing on progress made in NAP implementation during the period under review. The nature of the information provided does not always make it possible to appreciate the ongoing trends and the factors involved.

### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

70. The following conclusions and recommendations could be summarized from the synthesis:

- Capacity-building continues to be vital for the UNCCD process. Main areas for enhanced assistance are capacity initiatives for participatory approaches, institutional strengthening, resource mobilization, in particular for GEF funding, and the scientific field. In this respect, countries that have so far not been able to advance in this area should receive technical and financial assistance.
- NAP mainstreaming remains a challenge and policy debates are necessary to ensure that adequate funding for NAP implementation will eventually be made available by development partners.

- A reiteration of the importance of the NAP is crucial so as not to lose the momentum in utilizing it as a programming tool for combating land degradation and desertification, and to achieve the objectives of broader development strategies.
- Reports called for streamlining funding procedures, and GEF procedures in particular. The CRIC may wish to address this issue with a view to initiating discussions at COP 8.
- Results from NSCA exercises should be utilized more prominently within the UNCCD process in the pursuit of synergistic implementation of the Rio Conventions at the national level.
- Policy debates on, and activities aiming at, the inclusion of the private sector should be promoted in order to systematically tap financial resources for UNCCD implementation.
- Taking into consideration the wealth of scientific information available on the Internet, more efforts should be made to channel it to countries of the region through subregional and regional networks.

-----