



**UNITED
NATIONS**



**Convention to Combat
Desertification**

Distr.
GENERAL

ICCD/CRIC(6)/2
18 July 2007

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Sixth session

Madrid, 4–7 September 2007

Item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda

Review of the Implementation of the Convention and of its institutional arrangements

Comprehensive review of the activities of the secretariat

Comprehensive review of the activities of the secretariat

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

The activities of the secretariat derive from the relevant provisions of the Convention and its regional implementation annexes, and decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP). In the period following COP 7 these activities have continued focusing on servicing the COP and its subsidiary bodies, policy advocacy, awareness raising and facilitating priority implementation processes under the Convention. Progress made in all these areas has been recorded in this document.

When considering the activities of the secretariat, the COP at its eighth session may wish to provide guidance to the secretariat on its work in various areas pertaining to the Convention process, including those mentioned above.

* The submission of this document was delayed due to the short time available between the fifth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties.

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....	1–4	3
II. SERVICE TO THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES	5–33	3
A. Conference of the Parties	5–13	3
B. Committee on Science and Technology	14–20	4
C. Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention	21–30	5
D. Working groups established by the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties	31–36	6
III. POLICY ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING	37–53	7
A. Institutional liaison and coordination.....	37–49	7
B. Synergies and coalition building.....	50	9
C. Public information and awareness raising.....	51	9
D. Advisory support in policy and legislative matters.....	52–53	9
IV. FACILITATION OF PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES AND PROGRESS MADE BY AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES	54–78	10
V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	79	13

I. Background information

1. Article 23, paragraph 2 (f), of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) requests the secretariat to prepare reports on the execution of its functions under the Convention and to present them to the Conference of the Parties (COP). By its decision 1/COP.5, the COP established the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), and decided that, at sessions of the CRIC held during sessions of the COP, the CRIC shall regularly review reports prepared by the secretariat on the execution of its functions.
2. In accordance with decision 11/COP.1, the secretariat is requested to prepare, after the third ordinary session and following every subsequent ordinary session of the COP, a report summarizing the conclusions of the review process. Taking into consideration the deliberations by Parties during sessions of the CRIC, this document attempts to highlight the secretariat's contribution to major developments in the implementation process of the Convention, while comprehensive assessments resulting from the review processes are contained in the reports of the CRIC at its first (ICCD/CRIC(1)/10), third (ICCD/CRIC(3)/9) and fifth (ICCD/CRIC(5)/11) sessions.
3. By its decision 5/COP.3 the COP requested the secretariat to provide at forthcoming sessions of the COP a synthesis by each subregion, with the aim of compiling a comparative document on the progress made by affected country Parties in the implementation of the Convention. Such a synthesis is contained in document ICCD/CRIC(5)/3.
4. In several other decisions (notably 5/COP.3 and 3/COP.6), the COP requested the secretariat to report on its activities undertaken together with the Global Mechanism (GM).

II. Service to the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies

A. Conference of the Parties

5. In accordance with article 23 of the Convention, the secretariat serviced the COP and its subsidiary bodies by facilitating preparations for the seventh session of the COP (COP 7) and transmitting documents for consideration by the Parties.
6. COP 7 was held from 17 to 28 October 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya. A total of 37 pre-session documents were submitted to the COP for consideration, and 20 documents were prepared for the sessions of the subsidiary bodies – the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the CRIC – that were held in conjunction with the COP session.
7. In keeping with the practice followed at previous sessions, a sessional Committee of the Whole (COW) was established at COP 7, open to the participation of all Parties. Most of the major agenda items were allocated to the COW. In order to enable each matter to be discussed in detail, the COW established a number of contact groups, which met several times during the two-week session.
8. The CST held its three-day session during the first week of COP 7. The CST discussed, inter alia, the work of the Group of Experts, its future programme of work and several

substantive matters including benchmarks and indicators, traditional knowledge and early warning systems.

9. The items on the agenda of the CRIC at its fourth session included the consideration of the report of CRIC 3 that focused on the implementation of the Convention in Africa and selected global issues; review of the policies, operational modalities and activities of the GM; collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF); and procedures for communication of information.

10. The high-level segment of COP 7 was held in the second week of the session. It included statements and an interactive dialogue on the theme "Economic opportunities in drylands". The interactive dialogue was launched by a presentation of a background document on the theme.

11. Representatives of 167 Parties, two observer States, 16 United Nations organizations, 21 intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and 85 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in the meetings of the COP and its subsidiary bodies.

12. Thirty-one decisions were adopted at COP 7, of which eight were on the recommendation of the CST and six on the recommendation of the CRIC. The report on COP 7 is contained in document ICCD/COP(7)16 and Add.1.

13. COP 8 will take place from 3 to 14 September 2007 in Madrid, Spain. The eighth session of the CST and the sixth session of the CRIC will take place during COP 8, and a special segment with high-level participation will be organized as well. Preparations for the COP and the sessions of its subsidiary bodies included the preparation of 67 pre-session documents (about 20 per cent more than for COP 7), negotiations with the Government of Spain for the signature of a Host Country Agreement, and liaison with the United Nations Office at Geneva. Numerous issues relating to the general organization of the sessions, including conference facilities and equipment, provision of conference services and staff servicing the sessions, registration of participants, and questions relating to security, immigration requirements and local transportation, were also addressed.

B. Committee on Science and Technology

14. As the emphasis of the Convention process has moved towards the implementation of action programmes, the COP has highlighted the need for scientific and technological inputs and cooperation. In accordance with the relevant COP decisions, the CST and its Group of Experts (GoE) have taken a more active role in the review of implementation and have intensified work in many of the core areas of the Convention process, most notably in benchmarks and indicators for monitoring and assessment of desertification. The secretariat has serviced the CST with the aim of ensuring appropriate follow-up to COP decisions.

15. CST 7 was held from 18 to 20 October 2005 in conjunction with COP 7. Eight decisions were adopted by the COP upon recommendations by the CST.

16. Following decisions 15/COP.7 and 20/COP.7, the GoE was requested to further implement its work programme. Particular emphasis was placed on the communication and

information strategy, the development of an integrative assessment methodology for poverty and land degradation, the development of benchmarks and indicators, and preparation of guidelines for early warning systems.

17. The fifth meeting of the GoE took place in Bonn, Germany, in April 2007. The meeting considered and adopted nine reports prepared on the implementation of the work programme (ICCD/COP(8)/CST/2/Add.1–9). The secretariat assisted the GoE in its work programme through facilitating communication, elaborating an intranet for the GoE and the Bureau of the CST, and coordinating the preparation of a publication by the GoE entitled “Opportunities for synergy among the environmental conventions”.

18. The secretariat also facilitated the work of the Bureau of the CST by organizing an intersessional meeting; assisting in communication and information-sharing with different bodies and working groups of the Convention; supporting its liaison with other international organizations; and providing, as requested, background information for the preparation of reports of the CST Bureau.

19. In response to various COP decisions, the CST Bureau and the GoE continued to follow closely the activities of the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) project and of the GEF, and participated in the preparation of the Global Environmental Outlook 4 (GEO 4), the GEO Africa and the GEO Deserts. The secretariat facilitated this process.

20. By its decision 20/COP.7, the COP decided that the priority theme for discussion for the next CST would be “The effects of climatic variations and human activities on land degradation: assessment, field experience gained, and integration of mitigation and adaptation practices for livelihood improvement”. In order to facilitate the discussion, the secretariat has collected and summarized related reports. It also assisted the World Meteorological Organization in bringing together experts at a workshop on climate and land degradation that was held in the United Republic of Tanzania in December 2006.

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

21. The fifth session of the CRIC (CRIC 5) took place from 12 to 21 March 2007 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It considered reports on implementation of the Convention submitted by affected country Parties from regions other than Africa, as well as relevant subregional reports and regional information.

22. The CRIC also considered reports by developed country Parties on measures taken to assist in the preparation and implementation of national action programmes (NAPs) of affected country Parties of regions other than Africa, including information on financial resources they have provided, or are providing, under the Convention, as well as information provided by relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, and other IGOs and NGOs, on their activities in support of the preparation and implementation of NAPs under the Convention. In the light of decision 1/COP.5, the Committee considered documents describing the outcomes of the subregional workshops of affected country Parties of regions other than Africa.

23. The secretariat assisted affected country Parties in the preparation of national, subregional and regional report, including through the assistance of funding provided by the GEF and its executing agencies. Ninety-eight affected countries from regions other than Africa submitted their reports on the implementation of the Convention for consideration at CRIC 5. In addition, 15 developed countries; seven United Nations organizations and three other IGOs submitted their reports on measures taken to assist affected countries in implementing the Convention.

24. In order to maximize the exchange of best practices, experiences and lessons learned between Parties and observers, seven panel discussions were organized to cover regional and global issues as described in the thematic topics of decision 1/COP.5 and the strategic areas of decision 8/COP.4.

25. The GoE provided its inputs to the review conducted at CRIC 5. A presentation by the Facilitator of the GoE, summarizing and analysing the scientific and technological aspects of the national reports, triggered substantive discussions on the further steps to be taken in these areas.

26. The Committee further reviewed available information regarding the mobilization and use of financial resources and other support by multilateral agencies and institutions, and considered necessary adjustments to the elaboration process and the implementation of NAPs, including review of the enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention, ways and means of promoting know-how and technology transfer, experience-sharing and information exchange among Parties and interested institutions and organizations, and ways and means of improving procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the COP.

27. A global interactive dialogue was convened on “Investments in rural areas in the context of combating land degradation and desertification”.

28. Representatives of 139 Parties, 9 United Nations organizations, 11 IGOs and 37 NGOs, and observers from the Holy See, attended CRIC 5.

29. In accordance with its terms of reference, the CRIC proposed recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention. The comprehensive report of the CRIC on its fifth session is contained in document ICCD/CRIC(5)/11.

30. CRIC 6 will take place from 4 to 7 September 2007 in conjunction with COP 8. It will consider the report of the Committee on its fifth session, the standing items on the agenda of its sessional sessions, and the report on procedures for improving the communication of information.

D. Working groups established by the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties

31. Two working groups were established at COP 7: the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG) with the mandate to develop a 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention, among other activities; and the Ad Hoc Working

Group (AHWG) on procedures for improving the communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the COP.

32. The COP also decided to establish an open-ended group to make recommendations to the COP at its eighth session on options for cost-effective and efficient regional coordination, and in particular on how to make the best use of the existing regional coordination units (RCUs). At its eighth session the COP is to decide on the role of, and institutional and budgetary arrangements relating to, the RCUs.

33. The secretariat facilitated the work of the working groups by arranging meeting facilities and related travel, facilitating communication and information flow, and providing and compiling information and submissions. These activities have been supported by voluntary contributions from a small number of developed country Parties.

34. The IIWG met in May and July 2006 and in April and May 2007. At its fourth meeting it adopted the “ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD (2008–2018)”. Detailed information on the work and outcomes of the IIWG is provided in document ICCD/COP(8)/10 and Add.1–2.

35. The AHWG met in March and June 2007 and finalized its preliminary report at the second meeting. Detailed information on the work and outcomes of the IIWG is provided in document ICCD/CRIC(6)/6 and Add.1.

36. Under the guidance of the President of the COP, the open-ended group convened a consultative meeting on 17 and 18 May 2007 in Bonn, Germany. The recommendations of the open-ended group are contained in document ICCD/COP(8)/13.

III. Policy advocacy and awareness raising

A. Institutional liaison and coordination

37. The secretariat has actively promoted the Convention in relevant international forums and processes and through contacts with organizations, institutions and individual countries, in order to foster the translation of the political recognition of the Convention into concrete action at national, subregional, regional and global levels.

38. In the context of the United Nations system, the secretariat has substantially contributed to the sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Conferences of the Parties of the other Rio Conventions, among others.

39. The participation of the secretariat in the above-mentioned events and processes has often contributed to the inclusion of UNCCD-related provisions in the respective conclusions. These provisions may be considered to reflect a stronger awareness of the Convention and of the developmental tools that it offers, and are also expected to result in broader-based cooperation and support for the implementation of the Convention.

40. The secretariat has also engaged in policy advocacy and information exchange with relevant partners and stakeholders. Institutional liaison with global international organizations and initiatives has included the establishment and deepening of working relationships, with a view to raising the response level for land degradation and desertification in these institutions and to spelling out modalities for concrete cooperation. Intensive liaison is pursued with many United Nations organizations, such as the World Bank, the GEF and regional development banks.

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

42. With regard to collaboration with the GM, decisions 3/COP.6 and 5/COP.6 requested the secretariat and the GM to develop and implement a biennial joint work programme. Such a programme was prepared for the biennium 2004–2005. For the following biennium (2006–2007) the secretariat prepared a draft on the basis of the previous programme, and submitted the resulting proposal in December 2005 for the consideration of the GM. A response to the proposal was received in August 2006. A revised proposal was submitted to the GM by the secretariat in September the same year, to which the GM responded in October. Brief consultations on the issue were held by the GM and the secretariat at the end of October, and in January 2007 the secretariat sent the next revised version to the GM. By 15 July 2007, the secretariat has received no response to this proposal.

43. Throughout the above-mentioned exchanges there was an apparent divergence of opinions between the GM and the secretariat. The secretariat considered the essence of the joint work programme to be a (generic) series of activities to assist affected countries in bringing forward the implementation of the UNCCD, for which activities the secretariat would have a policy advisory role and the GM would provide financing. The GM, on the other hand, seemed to prefer more policy-oriented cooperation activities, including joint analysis of issues and processes that relate to the implementation of the UNCCD at national and subregional levels, and preparations for the meetings of the COP and its subsidiary bodies. It was clear for both entities that the joint work programme would be thoroughly reconsidered after COP 8, in the light of strategic guidance to be given by Parties.

44. Although the joint work programme for 2006–2007 has not been finalized, the secretariat and the GM have carried out joint activities on an ad hoc basis. Such activities have included cooperation on the preparation of the Central African subregional action programme (SRAP), organization of a workshop for the Southeast Asia SRAP and facilitation of the further development of the regional action programme (RAP) for Latin America and the Caribbean.

45. In the field of policy advocacy towards affected country Parties, the secretariat has facilitated the integration of NAPs into overall national development frameworks, strategies and programmes. Furthermore, links have been fostered between the implementation of the UNCCD and relevant international and regional initiatives, such as the environment initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Country Pilot Partnership Initiative of the GEF secretariat and the developing TerrAfrica partnership platform. In many countries the national level advocacy functions of the secretariat have furthered the inclusion of combating

desertification into the agendas and work programmes of governmental bodies, scientific institutions and other national stakeholders.

46. The secretariat has also assisted in strengthening the awareness and involvement of political authorities and parliamentary officials in the implementation of the Convention through, among other means, active advocacy for the Convention in regional and subregional contexts. This has included participation in some key processes such as the summit and specified ministerial meetings under the African Union, meetings of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) relating to land degradation, the Environment for Europe process, and the Economic and Environmental Forum organized under the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

47. With regard to advocacy functions concerning science and technology, the secretariat facilitated the participation of the GoE and CST Bureau members and of members of the roster of independent experts or the science and technology correspondents in numerous international meetings and events, notably in the context of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD), including scientific and steering committees, side events, review processes, awareness-raising activities, and training and networking activities. Also the secretariat participated in some international conferences.

48. The advocacy in the field of science and technology resulted in the facilitation of several scientific initiatives, such as the creation of the European DesertNet that was launched in Bonn in November 2006, international conferences and publications. It strengthened the promotion of the UNCCD framework (NAPs, SRAPs, and RAPs) in the context of the development of research programmes.

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

B. Synergies and coalition building

50. By decision 12/COP.7, the secretariat was requested to continue its efforts to promote and strengthen relationships with other relevant conventions. Detailed information on the activities of the secretariat in this field can be found in document ICCD/COP(8)/4.

C. Public information and awareness raising

51. All activities relating to public information and awareness raising during the period covered by this report were carried out in the context of the IYDD. Detailed information on these activities can be found in document ICCD/COP(8)/11.

D. Advisory support in policy and legislative matters

52. One of the main duties of the secretariat regarding institutional and procedural matters of the COP and its subsidiary bodies is providing legal advice and advisory support on policy

issues. The secretariat has assisted Parties and the Bureaux of the COP and CRIC in matters concerning procedures and institutional questions.

53. Legal assistance has been provided to Parties in interpreting the provisions of the Convention, advising on legal aspects of substantive documentation including through the preparation of documents ICCD/COP(8)/7 and ICCD/COP(8)/8. This has also entailed liaising with the United Nation Office of Legal Affairs and with legal officers of other environmental agencies and other specialized agencies on legal matters.

IV. Facilitation of priority implementation processes and progress made by affected country Parties

54. Within the limits of its mandate, the secretariat has provided targeted support to affected countries, at their request, in meeting the requests set out in the Convention and in decisions of the COP.

55. At the national level, support to the preparation of national reports for CRIC 5 was a major activity in countries in regions other than Africa. The secretariat provided technical advice and channelled financial assistance during the national reporting process, and later prepared the compilation and synthesis documents on the basis of the reports received. Thirty-nine Asian, 31 Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) and 28 Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties submitted their reports for the consideration at CRIC 5. Prior to the CRIC session, regional peer review meetings were held.

56. The secretariat assisted affected country Parties, at their request, in preparing and advancing the implementation of the NAPs, including their continuing development. The NAPs of Albania, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Belize, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, Fiji, Gabon, Jamaica, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, and Uruguay have either already been completed or are advancing well.

57. Several countries that have already completed their NAPs were supported in bringing forward activities to implement the programme. Assistance was provided for setting up country pilot partnerships, an initiative of the GEF, as well as for involving relevant national level stakeholders and partners in the NAP process. In Africa, Asia and LAC, the secretariat has followed the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-driven project targeting least developed countries and small island developing States

58. The secretariat has further participated in the development of projects that have strong potential to contribute to combating desertification, and promoted them towards potential cooperation partners and relevant scientific and financial institutions. It has also facilitated institutional capacity-building in some countries, and in collaboration with the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands launched the development of training to enhance negotiation skills of developing countries.

59. According to decision 15/COP.7 on the effectiveness and efficiency of the CST, science and technology correspondents have been nominated by a number of country Parties in order to facilitate communication with the scientific community.

60. At the subregional level, the secretariat has facilitated the development of SRAPs. SRAPs focus on assisting countries to jointly address problems that characterize their shared ecosystems, and also provide a channel for the affected country Parties, cooperation partners, and relevant institutions and agencies in each subregion to coordinate and link their activities to leverage experience. Since COP 7, the development of SRAPs has proceeded in terms of institutional coordination, although in many subregions progress in delivering pilot initiatives and other planned outputs has been delayed due to lack of funding.

61. In Africa, the secretariat promoted the SRAPs in the context of consultations concerning adaptation to climate change, and in various subregional and regional meetings. The preparation of the fifth African SRAP, for Central Africa, was facilitated particularly through support to coordination among the respective national focal points and relevant institutions. In support of national capacities of the Northern African country Parties, the secretariat facilitated the implementation of the Mediterranean Training Programme on Early Warning Systems.

62. In Asia, the Southeast Asian SRAP was validated in December 2006 and the development of joint activities is well under way. Central Asian countries have started the implementation of their SRAP through a joint training and capacity-building programme, and the possibility of establishing a drought management centre to service the subregion, with support from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, has been discussed. Four Northeast Asian countries have agreed to formulate a framework for a SRAP. In the Pacific region, a project on land rehabilitation and drought management involving 14 Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste was launched in April 2007.

63. In LAC, the secretariat has assisted in the development of activities under the Gran Chaco, Gulf of Fonseca, Hispaniola and Puna Americana SRAPs. It has further facilitated the formulation of a subregional project on involving young people in combating desertification in the Caribbean region, and participated in a project concerning integrated water management through improved agroforestry concepts in the drylands of Latin America.

64. In Europe, the secretariat assisted southeast European countries in cooperation with WMO in the establishment of a subregional drought management centre. A kick-off meeting of the centre was held in April in Slovenia. The countries in Transcaucasus are currently considering the establishment of a similar centre in that subregion.

65. At the regional level, joint activities focus on advancing cooperation on thematic and scientific issues among affected countries covered by the five regional implementation annexes of the Convention. They involve institutional collaboration, both horizontally between various organizations working on a specific theme, and vertically among stakeholders at national, subregional, regional and international levels. They also have strong potential to contribute to enhancing the knowledge base of the Convention, and to support the work of the CST.

66. Under their RAPs, the African, Asian and LAC country Parties have identified priority areas in which regional cooperation would be most cost-effective and create added value for the NAP processes. The implementation of the RAPs has so far taken place through thematic programme networks (TPNs), each of which focuses on a specific priority theme, with a view to promoting best practices. To date, all six TPNs in Africa and all six in Asia, and five TPNs in LAC, have been launched.

67. In Africa, further development of the RAP process continued on the basis of the six TPNs. A workshop to launch the RAP and its overall implementation strategy is planned to be held soon. The secretariat also contributed to several region-wide processes, initiatives and projects, such as TerrAfrica, The Great Green Wall for the Sahara initiative and activities to combat desertification under the NEPAD environment initiative and Environmental Plans of Action.

68. In Asia, work under most TPNs continued. Under TPN1 on monitoring and assessment, the regional desertification map will be finalized as soon as related funding is identified. Under TPN2 on agroforestry, the “Agroforestry manual for the Asia-Pacific region” was published as a CD-ROM, which enabled its wide distribution. With regard to TPN3 on rangeland management, partnerships with private sector were further advanced. The implementation of TPN6 on integrated local area programmes is planned to be started before the end of 2007 through a study on enabling environments, a related workshop and the launching of a website. In order to promote South–South cooperation among countries affected by desertification, a workshop on economic opportunities in drylands will be organized in Beijing, China, at the end of 2007.

69. In LAC, the RAP is currently under review, which is expected to result in an agreement on the activities to be carried out during the next five years (2008–2012). Five of the six TPNs under the RAP have now been launched. The fifth TPN, on traditional knowledge, was launched in May 2007; it was built on the outcomes of a six-week electronic forum held in April–May 2006 through the LAC information network DESELAC (TPN2). The e-forum served to clarify the substantive orientation of the network, and to integrate the TPN with other relevant initiatives. The launching meeting further discussed the parameters, objectives and programme of work of the network.

70. In Africa, Asia and LAC regions, the regional coordination units (RCUs) have been instrumental in bringing forward the implementation of the Convention. They have strengthened information delivery on matters concerning the Convention through various means, including the establishment of regional websites, publication of newsletters, and preparing technical papers and other information on specific issues concerning countries in the respective regions and subregions and related action programmes.

71. The RCUs have served in establishing contacts between affected country Parties and their development partners and research institutions, and in promoting the Convention in various regional organizations and institutions, with particular emphasis on the three host institutions, namely the African Development Bank, UNESCAP and UNECLAC. They have also advocated for the Convention through participation in various subregional and regional meetings relating to combating desertification.

72. In the context of regional cooperation among the Northern Mediterranean affected countries, Turkey is planning to organize two workshops, one each on afforestation and water rehabilitation techniques, in 2007.

73. In Central and Eastern Europe, the establishment of a regional network on afforestation is close to completion by the host country, Romania. In line with the agreed initiatives for regional cooperation, a regional training centre on afforestation has been established in Armenia, and another training centre focusing on erosion, risk assessment and soil monitoring, among other issues, is planned to be started in Bulgaria. Furthermore, a regional reference centre in the area of soil conservation has been established in the Czech Republic.

74. For future action at the subregional and regional levels, the major challenge lies in the translation of the decisions of their members into clearly defined, concrete actions, taking into consideration the existing strengths and needs of each participating country and institution, while at the same time strengthening cooperation and information exchange. Systematic support in the near future will be important in sustaining the potential of subregional and regional cooperation and in assisting the related collaboration frameworks to become fully operational and established in the regions. In this regard, it will be important to ensure that the subregional and regional work programmes have direct bearing on national level activities.

75. In all regions, consultations will be held in order to prepare for COP 8. In these consultations, the countries in each region will consider key issues in the COP agenda, including the reports of IIWG and the AHWG, the outcomes of CRIC 5, the review of the CRIC and the budget for the Convention for the next biennium.

76. At the interregional level, in the framework of the Interregional Platform of Cooperation between Africa and LAC, an exchange of experiences and collaboration on agroforestry is being organized between Benin and Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, as a concrete initiative deriving from the 2004 Africa-LAC forum.

77. The fifth Africa-LAC forum with the theme "Forestry and agroforestry as tools for the enhancement of market-oriented sustainable agricultural farming systems" was held in June 2007. The purpose of the meeting was to identify concrete activities for implementation in partnership between interested African and LAC countries in the area of forestry and agroforestry.

78. During the second half of 2007, a number of African experts will visit Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras, to meet local farmers and exchange information with them on sustainable land management in drylands. Later, farmers from Central American countries will visit Africa to meet experts and practitioners and exchange information with them on traditional methodologies used in semi-arid ecosystems. The outcomes and lessons learned during this exchange project will be presented in a scientific publication.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

79. The secretariat has sought to focus its activities on areas that can best serve the Parties in meeting their obligations under the Convention, while taking into account the limited resources

available. When reviewing the activities of the secretariat after COP 8, taking into consideration the ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention, the Parties may wish to guide the secretariat:

(a) To enhance its servicing functions to support COP and CRIC sessions including the provision of analytical reports and continued support to Parties' efforts in monitoring the implementation of the Convention;

(b) To adopt strategic and programmatic instruments in line with the strategic guidance of the COP and to further enhance its policy advocacy, agenda setting and representation functions;

(c) To develop its capacity to service the CST effectively by supporting the knowledge management systems established by the CST, performing information and knowledge brokering functions including liaison with relevant scientific organizations, supporting the convening and mobilization by the CST of relevant science, knowledge and technical capacities, and supporting the mainstreaming of CST-related activities into the programming instruments of the Convention;

(d) To develop its awareness-raising through a comprehensive information strategy with the aim of furthering and strengthening the achievement of the objectives of the Convention and securing the political and financial commitments needed to enhance the implementation of the Convention;

(e) To continue its collaboration with relevant conventions and organizations, particularly within the Joint Liaison Group, in order to strengthen cooperation in the implementation process of the Rio Conventions;

(f) To continue its support to efforts of affected country Parties to strengthen dialogue and consultation at subregional and/or regional and interregional level and to continue servicing the regional implementation annexes on request through facilitating cooperation at regional/sub-regional levels, also in the context of a joint biennial work plan with the GM.
