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INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE
FOR THE ELABORATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL
CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION
IN THOSE COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING SERIOUS
DROUGHT AND/OR DESERTIFICATION,
PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA
Tenth session
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Agenda item 2

REPORT ON A DRAFT PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Note by the Secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In decision 9/11, adopted at its ninth session, the INCD invited interested INCD members to transmit to the Secretariat, by 15 October 1996, comments and views on a proposed programme of work for the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). The same decision requested the Secretariat to prepare and report on such a programme, based on comments and views received, for consideration at the Committee's tenth session.

2. As of 25 October 1996, the Secretariat had received comments and views from seventeen governments, as well as helpful inputs from three intergovernmental organizations.

3. The submissions received pointed to four substantive areas which could receive priority in the initial work programme of the CST. These areas are consistent with relevant articles of the Convention, with work underway in the INCD, and with the terms of reference for the CST that the INCD is recommending to the Conference of the Parties (COP). The following section of this note discusses these four areas. The last section provides some ideas on further development of the CST work programme.

4. In pursuing work in these or other areas, the CST will need to establish appropriate links with the scientific and technical advisory bodies of related conventions and with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations undertaking work of potential interest to the CST. Document A/AC.241/67, which the Secretariat is presenting for consideration at the tenth session, deals with this important issue. It might also be appropriate for the CST to discuss it at its first session. In addition, the CST will need to oversee the maintenance of the roster of experts and the formation of ad hoc panels needed to facilitate its work. In adopting its programme of work, the CST is directed under paragraph 7 of its terms of reference to include estimates regarding its financial implications, which would include the costs of such panels.

II. PROPOSED PRIORITY AREAS OF INITIAL CST WORK PROGRAMME

A. Networking of institutions, agencies and bodies

5. Under article 25 of the Convention, the CST shall, under the supervision of the COP, provide for the undertaking of a survey and evaluation of relevant existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies willing to become units of a network to support implementation of the Convention. The CST shall, on the basis of this survey and evaluation, recommend to the COP ways and means of facilitating and strengthening networking of the units to ensure that the thematic needs of articles 16-19 are addressed. These obligations are reinforced in identical language in the terms of reference of the CST.

6. This work by the CST would allow the COP to identify units most appropriate for networking, to recommend operational procedures and a time frame and to identify units best suited to facilitate and strengthen networking at all levels.

7. In its initial work programme the CST could carry out the survey and evaluation in three phases. Recognizing that a comprehensive survey of all relevant networks, institutions, agencies and bodies would be time consuming, the first phase could concentrate on identifying only the principal potential units, particularly existing networks. Since networking priorities would vary among regions and subregions, the second phase could then be a pilot, in-depth survey and evaluation of potential units in a particular region and subregion. In the third phase, this pilot survey and evaluation could be replicated in other regions and subregions. In all three phases, the units surveyed and evaluated would include governmental and intergovernmental organisations, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions and other private sector entities.

8. The first phase of the survey and evaluation could include the following components:

- (a) identification of the main existing networks and their role in areas such as information collection and exchange, research, technology transfer, capacity building, policy formulation and local-level activities;
- (b) mapping of the actual and potential components and categories of users of these networks and their geographical coverage;
- (c) enumeration of the information needs of actual and potential users and the extent to which such needs are being met in relation to the provisions of articles 16-19 of the Convention;
- (d) evaluation of the linkages among the main networks, including overlaps and gaps;
- (e) elucidation of factors facilitating effective functioning of the main networks, as well as constraints to their effectiveness;
- (f) elaboration of the purposes and benefits of strengthening networks at various levels; and
- (g) recommendation of candidates for the pilot, in-depth survey and evaluation at the regional and subregional levels in the second phase.

9. The most practical way to carry out the first phase of the survey and evaluation would be to entrust it to an existing organization that is already an active participant in networks dealing with desertification and drought mitigation. The INCD could, after agreeing on terms of reference, ask a short list of such organizations to draw up costed proposals. On the basis of these proposals, the CST, during the first session of the Conference of the Parties, could then select the preferred candidate.

B. Benchmarks and indicators

10. Several provisions of the Convention highlight the importance of benchmarks and indicators in its implementation. For this reason, the INCD has asked the Secretariat to undertake preliminary work on this subject in collaboration with other competent institutions. Under paragraph 2 (b) (ii) of its terms of reference, the CST functions include the making of recommendations on pertinent, quantifiable, and verifiable indicators which might be used in connection with action programmes.

11. Benchmarks and indicators would, therefore, logically be a second priority area for the CST's initial work programme, which could take account of the need to contribute to appropriate capacity-building in developing countries. In this connection, the CST could ask the Permanent Secretariat to continue the work begun by the Interim Secretariat. It could also draw up the terms of reference for an ad hoc panel on this subject and make recommendations to the first session of the COP on its formation.

C. Inventories of traditional and local technology, knowledge, know-how and practices

12. A significant component of the bottom-up approach of the Convention is the protection, promotion and use of relevant traditional and local technology, knowledge, know-how and practices. As a basis for carrying out these obligations, the Parties undertake, in accordance with article 18 (2) (a) of the Convention to make inventories in this area, and disseminate the resulting information. The CST terms of reference also deal with this subject (paragraph 2).

13. Many affected developing countries will require assistance in drawing up such inventories. Action to facilitate their preparation would, therefore, be a third appropriate priority of the CST's initial work programme. It will also be important to have some consistency in the format and content of the inventories, both to make them comparable and to enhance their utilization in information exchange within subregions and regions, as well as globally. To further these ends, the CST could agree on terms of reference for an ad hoc panel to develop methodologies for preparing and disseminating the inventories, and then make appropriate recommendations to the first session of the COP on formation of the panel.

D. Establishment of research priorities

14. Article 17 of the Convention lays out the obligations of Parties regarding research, including the development and strengthening of research capabilities in affected developing countries and the promotion of joint research programmes. It also calls for the inclusion of research priorities in action programmes, which the COP is to review periodically on the advice of the CST. The CST terms of reference consequently provide that it should advise on possible research priorities and make recommendations regarding specialised research and for promoting cooperative and comparative research.

15. The Convention emphasizes a "demand-driven" approach to research that meets the specific needs of local population. Such an approach will require innovative methodologies for setting research priorities, so this would be an appropriate item for the CST work programme. In carrying out this function, the CST might benefit from the formation of an ad hoc panel, on which the CST could make appropriate recommendations to the COP.

III. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF CST INITIAL WORK PROGRAMME

16. On the basis of discussion of the CST's initial work programme in Working Group II, the INCD could request the Secretariat, drawing as appropriate on this note, to present an annotated agenda for the CST's first session and to prepare the documentation the INCD decides is needed for the consideration of various items.