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PROGRAMME AND BUDGET

**Need for, modalities for, costs involved in, and feasibility and possible
terms of reference of the regional coordination units**

Note by the secretariat

Addendum

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. By decision 6/COP.5, the Conference of the Parties (COP) recognized the importance of regional approaches and coordination in the implementation of the Convention, and the value of efforts at the regional level currently identified as the “regional coordination units (RCUs)” initiative. The secretariat was therefore requested to prepare a background document on the need for, modalities for, costs involved, and feasibility and possible terms of reference of the RCUs, in order to enable the COP to consider this agenda item at its sixth session.

II. NEED FOR REGIONAL COORDINATION UNITS

2. Successful implementation of the Convention depends largely on the integration and coordination of a range of social, economic and environmental activities which influence the causes of desertification. It calls, more than any other sustainable development processes, for the enhancement of cooperation and coordination at national, subregional, regional and international levels. Furthermore, the regional implementation annexes are a unique feature and an integral part of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), providing the framework for institutional set-ups, decision-making processes and the subsequent implementation of UNCCD-related activities.

3. The trend in the United Nations system is to decentralize its developmental and technical assistance programmes to the regions, based on a framework of political collaboration arising from common needs and similar cultural and geographic situations, which allows a more effective implementation of United Nations programmes. In this regard, regional coordination is essential for implementation of the UNCCD to enable cost-effective integration of cross-sectoral issues and collaborative efforts between countries addressing similar problems at subregional and regional levels.

4. In accordance with article 11 of the Convention and the relevant provisions of the regional implementation annexes, country Parties from Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) started consultations on the elaboration of their regional action programmes (RAPs) to combat desertification soon after the entry into force of the UNCCD. Guided by the provisions of the respective regional implementation annexes, these consultations recognized the added value of regional facilitation mechanisms to strengthen the capacity of the Parties and to promote cooperation amongst them within each of the respective regions. The consultations led to decisions by the countries of the three regions to put in place, through specific arrangements within the institutional regional frameworks, RCUs which would help them to develop further their information exchange and collaborative actions to implement their RAPs and thereby to meet their obligations under the Convention.

5. Arrangements with the existing decentralized offices of international organizations provide the RCUs with the opportunity to incorporate the UNCCD into regional activities and to contribute to strengthening synergism among the relevant agencies involved in the implementation of complementary multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

6. The RCUs have already shown their ability to be responsive to Parties' needs and to link UNCCD activities to those of other regional frameworks relating to sustainable development issues. For instance, the RCUs have been instrumental in promoting the technical networks, which are essential in implementing the RAPs. Their location within regional bodies with specific activities relating to Convention implementation creates an important added value by allowing the facility to influence and to interlink those activities germane to the action programmes which are being undertaken by these organizations. This is the case for Africa, where opportunities that can be synergistic with the goals of the respective national action programmes (NAPs) can be identified within the African Development Bank's rural development portfolio, as well as those activities undertaken by the World Bank in collaboration with the African Development Bank in this area. In Asia, similarly, there is a linkage with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's (ESCAP) socio-economic policy and assessment activities, and in Latin America there is a link with the activities of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

7. The first meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) recommended several steps to strengthen the implementation of the UNCCD further. Through their presence in the regions and frequent contacts with relevant national, subregional and regional actors, the RCUs do have the potential to improve and help the country Parties in fulfilling their obligations vis à vis the Convention. The RCUs could in particular support many of the actions recommended by the CRIC, which include:

- Assistance to the country Parties in updating the information provided to the CRIC through the preparation of country profiles within the national reports;
- Support to disseminating at the grass-roots level appropriate technologies for soil and water resource management;
- Support to a comprehensive work programme on best practices and to compilation of an inventory of traditional knowledge under the regional implementation annexes; and
- Linking of regional and subregional centres of excellence more closely with the UNCCD process (subregional action programmes (SRAPs) and RAPs) in the promotion of synergies between MEAs.

III. MODALITIES

8. Three RCUs of the UNCCD were established within existing decentralized organizations, to bring about the institutional linkages necessary in order better to address the various aspects of UNCCD implementation. At the request of the countries of the regions, the UNCCD secretariat assisted the establishment of these facilities by negotiating and concluding the institutional arrangements with the host organizations and, as appropriate, with the host countries, including the memoranda of understanding that govern the functioning of the RCUs. These units are at present hosted as follows:

- Africa, by the African Development Bank in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (since December 1999)
- Asia, by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, Thailand (since September 2000)

- Latin America and the Caribbean, by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Mexico City, Mexico (since September 2002).

9. The RCUs contribute already to the following:

- (a) Facilitating policy consensus at the regional level and greater awareness on the part of policy makers of countries and relevant international institutions regarding the need to rationalize and coordinate their approaches in order to obtain the maximum benefit from UNCCD implementation;
- (b) Reviews of existing programmes, projects and activities at the regional level with a view to harmonizing them in the light of the provisions of the Convention and to seeking convergence in the process of elaborating and implementing the RAPs;
- (c) Strengthening of the capacities of country Parties and subregional and regional organizations, in terms of formulating, managing and coordinating their policies, projects and programmes with regard to combating desertification;
- (d) Launching of the activities of the thematic programme networks (TPNs) and substantial contributions to the exchange of information between the networks. The RCUs are charged with the task of ensuring that information concerning activities under the networks is effectively disseminated to benefit national and local level activities in the affected countries.
- (e) Support to implementation and appropriate follow-up of the Convention at the regional level, and strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation, notably with a view to achieving greater synergy in the implementation process of the three Rio conventions (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biological Diversity, UNCCD) and the relevant MEAs.

10. Regional intergovernmental and expert consultations provide the political and technical frameworks for the establishment of collaborative action amongst the country Parties in the respective regions. These consultations have been taking place in all of the regions since the adoption of the Convention, as follows:

Africa

18-21 March 1997, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

2-5 November 1998, Tunis, Tunisia

30 September - 1 October 1999, Nairobi, Kenya

22-24 October 2000, Algiers, Algeria

27-29 August 2001, Maputo, Mozambique

15-19 July 2002, Windhoek, Namibia

30 June - 4 July 2003, Cotonou, Benin

Asia

21-23 August 1996, New Delhi, India
13-15 May 1997, Beijing, China
26-28 May 1998, Ohtsu Shiga, Japan
24-25 July 1999, Beijing, China
7-8 November 2000, Bangkok, Thailand
26-27 June 2001, Ulan Bator, Mongolia
8-12 July 2002, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
7-11 June 2003, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Latin America and the Caribbean

24-26 January 1996, Buenos Aires, Argentina
17-19 June 1996, Mexico City, Mexico
10-12 March 1997, Havana, Cuba
29 April - 1 May 1998, St. John, Antigua and Barbuda
9-12 August 1999, Lima, Peru
17-19 October 2000, San Salvador, El Salvador
21-24 August 2001, La Serena, Chile
29 July - 1 August 2002, Bridgetown, Barbados
18-21 June 2003, Bogotá, Colombia

IV. COSTS INVOLVED

11. For the purposes of carrying out their mandates, each of the existing RCUs has been provided by the host institutions with office space, equipment and administrative facilities. The secretariat of the Convention has been requested by the country Parties concerned to support their efforts in strengthening the capacity of these units through the recruitment of the three regional coordinators.

12. Consequently, the secretariat has been able to mobilize, on an interim basis, supplementary funds from interested partners, including relevant subregional organizations, partially to support the functioning of the RCUs. So far the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Meteorological Organization and the African Union as well as Argentina, China, Cuba and Mexico have contributed towards the activities and functioning of the units.

13. The sustainability of the above scheme must, however, be strengthened by a regular and predictable source of funding for the staff of the three RCUs. Only then would the required institutional continuity enable a consequent planning of the activities of the RCUs in the long term, thus improving their efficiency and effectiveness.

14. It is estimated that an amount of US\$ 651,000 will be required for one year to cover the costs of the functioning of the RCUs, which include staff salaries of the three units (see table below).

Estimated yearly costs for the functioning of the RCUs
(US dollars)

Item	Africa	Asia	LAC	Total
Salary (one coordinator per RCU)	133,000	133,000	133,000	399,000
Clerical costs (one GS staff per RCU)	59,000	59,000	59,000	177,000
Subtotal	192,000	192,000	192,000	576,000
Overhead costs	25,000	25,000	25,000	75,000
Total	217,000	217,000	217,000	651,000

15. The costs of the programme of work and other costs of the RCUs including, *inter alia*, communication, travel and supplies, would continue to be funded through voluntary contributions under the Supplementary Fund.

V. FEASIBILITY

16. The RCUs have already played a significant role in orchestrating political and technical collaboration amongst Parties, in enabling the establishment of TPNs, and in initiating a dialogue amongst different international agencies and governments in order to set in motion coordinated activities relating to UNCCD implementation.

17. Region-based facilities are essential in supporting countries to enable the implementation of international agreements and technical cooperation programmes. Undertaking these catalytic functions from a global headquarters perspective is more costly and less effective, which is why most United Nations agencies and programmes have decentralized or are decentralizing the coordination and conduct of their activities in the regions. On the other hand, to pursue a particular substantive agenda, such as combating desertification, it is necessary to have a full-time unit devoted solely to the topic, as this cannot be dealt with effectively as a task within a composite portfolio. The presence of a small and catalytic UNCCD regional facility within an existing regional organization is therefore the optimal institutional arrangement to ensure the timely and efficient delivery of expertise and assistance in questions relating to the implementation of the Convention by the countries concerned.

18. Taking into account the fact that the secretariat of the Convention and the Global Mechanism have agreed to pursue the development of a biennial joint work programme which aims to provide timely and coordinated support to the affected developing countries, the RCUs could be of considerable assistance in preparing and launching the agreed activities in the countries as well as in facilitating working collaborations with relevant subregional and regional organizations.

VI. POSSIBLE TERMS OF REFERENCE

19. The main purpose of the RCUs is to undertake the following functions, thus assisting the affected countries of the region in their efforts as well as the secretariat of the Convention in facilitating the implementation of the UNCCD:

(a) Promotion of the exchange of information and appropriate techniques, technical expertise and relevant experiences, while strengthening synergy with relevant multilateral environmental agreements, as well as with national strategies for sustainable development, including strategies for poverty eradication;

(b) Facilitation of comprehensive approaches for the development of national, subregional and regional action programmes, which integrate environmental and socio-economic actions;

(c) Participation in the coordination of activities among relevant sustainable development conventions and financial, subregional and regional organizations in carrying out priority activities in the context of the RAPs to combat desertification:

- (i) Promotion of capacity building for activities which are better implemented at the regional level;
- (ii) Support for the development of the RAPs as well as follow-up and evaluation of the implementation of national, subregional and regional action programmes in collaboration with relevant existing organizations, while paying due attention to the necessary relationships between the various levels;
- (iii) Follow-up of relevant decisions emanating from the COP and its subsidiary bodies, as well as of the outcomes of the regional meetings on the implementation of the Convention;
- (iv) Facilitation of consultative processes for the formulation of partnership agreements, mobilization of development partners and the organization of regular consultations with them through their representatives in the region;
- (v) Contribution to the development of the joint work programme with the Global Mechanism through the preparation of project proposals, distribution of information, provision of technical backstopping and assistance in the organization of workshops in the regions;
- (vi) Support for the development of new mechanisms, including desertification funds, for mobilizing domestic and external financial resources for the implementation of the Convention;
- (vii) Coordination of TPNs and of their contribution to interregional cooperation in order to enhance the coherence of the policy framework relating to the sustainable management of natural resources.

VII. CONCLUSION

20. The cost-effectiveness and added value of the RCUs has been demonstrated through their proactive contributions towards promoting the implementation of the Convention in the respective geographical areas, and the willingness of hosting organizations and affected country Parties to contribute to their running costs. The COP may wish to consider in the light of this report the provision of financial resources under the core budget for 2004-2005 in order to cover the salary costs of a coordinator and a secretary per RCU. It is anticipated that this arrangement will result in improved efficiency of the RCUs, and in improvements in their capacity to respond in a more predictable manner to the needs of the affected country Parties of the regions concerned.

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