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INPUTS FROM THE REGIONAL MEETINGS OF AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

Note by the secretariat

This document contains the inputs from the African Ministerial Conference Preparatory to the Sixth Session of the Conference of Parties (COP 6), which took place in Cotonou, Benin, from 30 June to 4 July 2003; the Sixth Regional Meeting of Asian Focal Points and Second Asian Ministerial Conference on UNCCD Implementation in Preparation for COP 6 (7-11 June 2003, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates); the Ninth Regional Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean country Parties to the UNCCD (18-20 June 2003, Bogotá, Colombia); and the Second Regional Meeting of Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties in preparation for COP 6 (10-11 July 2003, Geneva, Switzerland).

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I. AFRICA

A. Conclusions and recommendations of the African Ministerial Conference preparatory to the Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

The African Ministerial Conference preparatory to the Sixth Session of the Conference of Parties (COP 6), meeting in Cotonou, Benin, from 30 June to 4 July 2003, hereby recommends the following:

(a) Programme and budget for the biennium 2004-2005

Core budget 2004-2005

Based on the presentation made by the secretariat on the programme and budget for the biennium 2004-2005, the Conference notes the effect on the budget of the exchange rate between the United States dollar and the Euro, and the need to increase the budgets of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to enhance their performance. The Conference agrees to support the 2004-2005 draft programme and budget as stated in ICCD/COP(6)/2/Add.1, which was circulated in May 2003.

Contributions to the Convention's core budget

African Parties have committed themselves to meet their obligations in contributing to the core budget of the secretariat and have requested those countries that have not yet paid their arrears for 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 to do so before COP 6, in order to show commitment. The Conference further encouraged African countries to begin paying, from 1 January 2004, their contributions to the 2004-2005 budget which will be adopted during COP 6 in September 2003 in Havana, Cuba.

Regional coordination units

The Conference requests the COP to include the regional coordination units' (RCUs) operational costs in the 2004-2005 core budget, in order to ensure effective implementation of the Convention in all the regions and particularly in Africa.

(b) Implementation of the Convention

Follow-up to the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC)

Having considered the report of the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 1) (ICCD/CRIC(1)/10) and the presentation on the way forward given by the Chairperson of the CRIC, the Conference encourages African Parties to forward their suggestions on elements of draft decisions before the deadline of 15 July 2003 so that these suggestions can be taken into consideration during the preparation of draft decisions to be considered by COP 6.

The Conference also notes the salient issues such as renewable energy, water, trade, capacity building and education as elements of draft decisions and requests the secretariat to transmit them to the Chairperson of the CRIC.

Declaration on the commitments to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention

In conformity with the pertinent articles of the Convention and decision 8/COP.4 relating to the Declaration on the commitments to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention, the Conference urges African country Parties:

- to include in their reports to the COP strategic areas defined in the Declaration in order to allow a better assessment of the implementation of the Convention;
- to strengthen the process of mainstreaming issues on the implementation of the Convention, including national action programmes (NAPs), into national development strategies such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) and other relevant sectoral policies.

Assessment of the implementation of the recommendations adopted by African regional conferences preparatory to COPs

The Conference welcomes the analysis provided by the secretariat on the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of five previous African regional conferences preparatory to COPs held since 1997. It does request that such performance appraisal, with additional information on the issues that have not been taken up by COPs or African country Parties, should be provided on a regular basis. It is expected that a continuous update on the results obtained can contribute to increase the effectiveness of African regional conferences, since some shortcomings have been revealed through the analysis.

In this context, the Conference requests the secretariat to facilitate training in negotiation techniques, in order to support African country Parties in playing their role at the COPs.

Third series of national reports on Convention implementation

The Conference notes that the third series of reports on the implementation of the Convention will have to be finalized by African country Parties by early 2004, and requests the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to assist in obtaining the resources needed. At the same time, the secretariat is invited to review the Help Guide as appropriate and to assist, in collaboration with interested partners, in the preparation of country profiles.

(c) Development, adoption and implementation of action programmes

National level

The Conference notes that the African region has made significant progress in the implementation of the Convention and is considered to be working in the right direction. Considering the nexus of desertification and poverty and the extent of land degradation in Africa,

African countries are requested to give more political recognition and priority to these issues, in particular in appropriate government forums.

The Conference encourages the 24 African countries that have not yet finalized their NAPs to take all necessary measures to expedite the process of their development and adoption with the assistance of the Global Mechanism and the secretariat, with a view to finalizing them by the end of 2005 at the latest, as recommended in decision 8/COP/4. In this regard, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism are invited to pay due attention to the need for assistance to African small island countries.

The need for technical and financial assistance, notably through the secretariat and the Global Mechanism, to countries that have not yet finalized their NAPs, and for support to their implementation in the countries where they have been adopted, is also emphasized by the Conference.

The Conference takes note of the current consultative processes in some African countries towards the negotiation and conclusion of partnership agreements, and hereby invites African and developed countries to put in place and/or strengthen consultative mechanisms for the development of long-term partnerships including at local level.

The development partner countries are encouraged to take the measures necessary in order to play the role of “*chef de file*” as requested by African countries.

Finally, the Conference recommends COP 6 to encourage African countries to implement the recommendations of CRIC 1, by setting up and strengthening the consultative mechanisms in their countries which are necessary in order to conclude the partnership agreements with bilateral and multilateral partners and to mobilize the much-needed financial resources for NAP implementation. This process should benefit from relevant input coming from civil society actors whose experience contributes to effective implementation of the Convention.

Subregional level

The activities of African subregional organizations (Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC/CEEAC), Permanent Inter-state Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel/Economic Community of West African States (CILSS/ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Southern African Development Community (SADC), West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)) in the context of the formulation and/or implementation of the subregional action programmes (SRAPs) are noted by the Conference, and these organizations are encouraged to pursue their activities in supporting the NAPs in their respective subregions, and to cooperate for better development and implementation of trans-boundary programmes.

The countries in the Central African region are requested, with the assistance of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism, to take all necessary measures to expedite the process of the formulation of the SRAP.

All subregional institutions are encouraged to link the implementation process of their SRAPs closely with the Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of NEPAD and, as appropriate,

with the Regional Indicative Programmes in the context of the African Caribbean and Pacific Group of States/European Union (ACP-EU) Partnership Agreement.

Regional level

The Conference notes that the institutional focal points of the thematic programme networks (TPNs), which were designated by the African Ministerial Conference preparatory to COP 3, lacked the means necessary to carry out their assignments as planned. They are, however, requested to pursue activities of the existing networks (TPNs 1-4).

The Conference also notes the need to launch the other networks (TPNs 5 and 6) and the effective implementation of the planned activities of the existing networks, with the support of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism.

The Conference further invites the institutional focal points of the TPNs to respect the terms of reference as defined by the African Ministerial Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1999, and in particular the obligation to make use of their own resources to finance some activities.

The thematic institutional focal point of TPN 5 on the promotion of new and renewable energies is invited to get involved, as much as possible, in the preparation and deliberations of the International Conference on Renewable Energies scheduled for June 2004 in Germany, in order to participate actively in the debates and fully reflect the goals and objectives of the UNCCD.

The Conference encourages all TPN focal points to link closely with the activities of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), in order to reach common results that will contribute to the effective implementation of the Convention at regional level. The Environment Initiative of NEPAD, as well as the relevant decisions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) should also be taken into account in the implementation of TPN activities.

The Conference notes the temporary relocation of the African Development Bank (ADB) headquarters to Tunis, Tunisia, and requests the secretariat to take action as appropriate with regard to the relocation of the RCU hosted by ADB.

The Conference invites African countries, subregional and regional organizations, donor partners and multilateral organizations' donor partners and development partners to make voluntary contributions to facilitate effective implementation of the regional action programme (RAP) for Africa.

(d) Mobilization of financial resources

The Conference emphasizes the need for predictable and adequate funding for the formulation and implementation of NAPs, SRAPs and the RAP, in order to contribute to the eradication of rural poverty, particularly in the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid ecosystems, and launches an appeal in this regard to partners who have been participating in the preparation of action programmes.

African country Parties are requested to continue making available, in the context of their national budget allocations, substantial financial resources for the implementation of the Convention (National Desertification Funds).

(e) Support to Convention implementation from the GEF

The Conference requests COP 6 to welcome and accept the decision of the Second GEF Assembly declaring that the GEF shall be available to serve as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD. The Conference further invites COP 6 to welcome Operational Programme 15 (OP 15) and to provide guidance on the operational modalities including priority areas for funding, programme content, national communication activities and support activities to Convention programme tools. Guidance should be given at COP 6 in the context of additional operational programmes.

The Conference calls upon GEF implementing and executing agencies including ADB, in a concerted manner and in collaboration with the secretariat and the Global Mechanism, to take into consideration the three main levels of UNCCD implementation (NAPs, SRAPs, RAP) during the implementation of OP 15.

In this regard, the Conference welcomes the two training workshops to be organized by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Africa in the context of the recently approved GEF medium-sized project, and requests UNEP to hold them as soon as possible. The Conference also welcomes the various activities being formulated by the implementing and executing agencies of the GEF.

The GEF is requested to organize country dialogue workshops at national and subregional levels in the implementation framework of the Operational Programme on land degradation.

The Conference invites the Parties to consider the introduction of a standing item at COP sessions on the activities of the GEF in support of the implementation of the Convention.

(f) Global Mechanism

The Conference recommends that the facilitation committee members of the Global Mechanism (World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNEP, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), regional banks and the UNCCD secretariat) should continue to support the Global Mechanism in the discharge of its mandate with more sustained and concerted interventions.

The Conference commends the joint work programme of the Global Mechanism and the secretariat, launched in November 2002. The Conference supports the idea of the Global Mechanism's exploring new resources mobilization initiatives, including from the private sector, for implementation of the Convention.

The Conference recommends that the Global Mechanism should play a crucial role in assisting African countries in mobilizing resources, including those for co-financing GEF projects, consistent with its mandate and taking into account the results and recommendations of an independent evaluation of the Global Mechanism to be presented to COP 6. The Conference further

recommends to the second session of the CRIC (CRIC 2) that the Global Mechanism reinforce its support to mainstreaming and partnership building activities as tools for obtaining additional resources for NAP and SRAP implementation.

The Conference recommends the strengthening of south-south cooperation with the support of the Global Mechanism in the areas of mainstreaming, partnership building and resource mobilization.

(g) Synergies with other relevant conventions as well as with other international initiatives

Other conventions on sustainable development

The Conference takes note of international, national and local level workshops convened on synergies between conventions organized by some African countries with the support of the secretariat and other partners, and invites the secretariat to assess the outcome and follow-up actions of these workshops.

In conformity with the relevant CRIC 1 recommendations, the Conference requests the secretariat constantly to aim at improving the synergies between the scheduled activities in the Rio conventions and other relevant multilateral environmental agreements.

Environment initiative of NEPAD

The Conference welcomes the efforts undertaken jointly by the secretariat and UNEP in mainstreaming the UNCCD process on SRAPs and the RAP into the Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of NEPAD, and requests the subregional institutions to continue working towards the formulation of relevant activities and closely to follow up the implementation of the activities contained in the Action Plan. The Conference also requests the secretariat and the RCU, in liaison with the relevant subregional organizations, to ensure that project proposals to be funded under NEPAD are in harmony with SRAPs and the RAP. The Conference further requests the secretariat to continue supporting activities to combat desertification under the NEPAD framework.

ACP-EU partnership agreement

The Conference welcomes the recent adoption by the ACP-EU Council of Ministers of the joint document recognizing the key role of the UNCCD in sustainable management and utilization of natural resources. In this regard, the Conference calls upon the secretariat to continue strengthening its cooperation with the EU institutions and the ACP Secretariat.

(h) Committee on Science and Technology

The Conference takes note of, and welcomes the planned activities of, the CST Group of Experts, which aims at providing information and expertise to the CST in order to advise the COP efficiently on desertification matters. The Conference welcomes the work programme, which includes a large number of initiatives that could be prioritized and planned in a reasonable way. The CST is also requested to link such activities closely with the TPNs of the RAP.

In the interest of building synergies with the scientific bodies of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the CST is also encouraged to work closely with the corresponding bodies of these conventions and with other relevant institutions for their mutual benefit.

The CST is also requested to make information on appropriate technology to mitigate desertification available to farmers in affected areas in Africa (such as early warning systems).

(i) Enhancement of the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs).

The Conference recommends that NGO participation in preparation, follow-up and actual COP activities be enhanced through the attendance of a greater number of accredited NGOs and CBOs at COP sessions, in order to allow a better representation of NGOs and CBOs through extended consultations. The Conference requests African country Parties and the secretariat to undertake all steps necessary to this end. The Conference welcomes processes, which will strengthen the capacities of NGOs and CBOs and linkages with national, subregional and regional organizations.

The Conference, in conformity with decision 5/COP.5, encourages NGOs to prepare as appropriate in view of the open dialogue with NGOs scheduled to take place during COP 6. African NGOs attending the Cotonou meeting have consulted and have selected three topics for these open dialogue sessions. The three topics, covering agroforestry, soil conservation, water harvesting and management, pastoralism and rangeland management, also match three of the TPNs of the RAP for Africa.

The Conference recommends the putting in place in each African country of a programme of new opportunities for the socio-economic promotion of populations living around natural resources (appropriate technologies, infrastructures) with the objective of protecting the respective ecosystems in a sustainable manner.

(j) General

Outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development relevant to the UNCCD

The Conference expresses its appreciation of the outcomes of the WSSD and the decision of the world leaders to strengthen support for the implementation of the Convention, as reflected in the Johannesburg Plan of Action. The Conference recommends to COP 6 that decisions are made to ensure a close follow-up of the Johannesburg Plan of Action. In this context, concrete commitments such as activities on promoting new and renewable energies, sustainable management of water resources and sustainable agricultural production should be engaged.

Outstanding legal matters

The Conference recommends continuing support for the position taken by the Group of 77 and China on the Convention outstanding legal matters, including the consideration of rule 47 of the rules of procedure, the consideration of procedures and institutional mechanisms of UNCCD

implementation, and the consideration of the annexes containing arbitration and conciliation procedures.

Preparation of the Africa Group for COP 6 negotiations

The Conference agrees to establish six working groups, in order to prepare effectively for the major agenda items of COP 6:

1. Programme and budget
2. Global Environment Facility (GEF)
3. Global Mechanism
4. Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC)
5. Committee on Science and Technology (CST)
6. Regional coordination units (RCUs)

The Conference recommends that the respective chairpersons launch the activities of the working groups as soon as possible. The Conference also requests the secretariat to provide the relevant official COP 6 documentation and conference facilities, including interpretation services, in order to enable smooth running of the Africa Group meetings.

Composition of the Bureau of COP 6

The Conference recalls that at COP 1, the Bureau included the following African representatives: Southern Africa, East Africa and West Africa; at COP 2, the African representatives were West Africa and North Africa, at COP 3, representatives were from Central Africa, Southern Africa and West Africa, at COP 4, representatives were from West Africa and North Africa, and at COP 5, they were from Central Africa and East Africa.

This should be taken into consideration in the nomination of African country Parties for the COP 6 Bureau in order to ensure equitable geographical distribution.

B. Cotonou Declaration of the African Ministerial Conference preparatory to the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD

We, Ministers and heads of delegations of African country Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Seriously Affected by Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, gathered in Cotonou, Benin, from 3 to 4 July 2003, at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Benin and the UNCCD secretariat,

Considering that COP 6 to be held in Havana, Cuba, from 25 August to 5 September 2003, is of paramount importance in view of the key issues, which will be discussed with regard to strengthening the implementation of the Convention,

Considering that desertification remains a major hindering factor in Africa's development and contributes largely to the impoverishment of our populations,

Considering that, despite the tremendous efforts made by African countries since the adoption of the Convention in 1994, the lack of predictable and adequate financing continues to be

a handicap in the efficient and effective implementation of action programmes to combat desertification,

Considering the objectives of sustainable development adopted by the international community during the United Nations Millennium Summit (September 2000), as well as the conclusions of the World Trade Organization conference, which took place in Doha, Qatar, and the Monterrey Consensus at the International Conference on Financing for Development,

Considering the objectives adopted by the WSSD (August – September 2002) which recognizes the UNCCD as one of the relevant tools for poverty eradication,

Considering the decision taken by the Second Assembly of the GEF (October 2002) to make land degradation (desertification and deforestation) a focal area of the GEF,

Reiterate:

1. Our commitment to strengthening actions aimed at integrating our action programmes to combat desertification into policies and strategies for sustainable development in Africa, and particularly into poverty reduction strategies;
2. Our commitment to finalize the formulation of national, subregional and regional action programmes to combat desertification before the end of 2005;
3. Our will to engage and pursue with our main development partners the necessary consultative processes conducive to the establishment of partnership agreements as part of the fight against desertification;
4. Our commitment to meet our obligations in contributing to the core budget of the Convention and to pay our arrears before the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties;
5. Our will to promote the fight against desertification in line with major African initiatives such as actions planned in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD),

Call upon the Parties at the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties:

1. To take necessary proactive measures to strengthen the implementation of the Convention in Africa;
2. To accept the availability of the GEF to serve as a funding mechanism of the Convention and to make sure that adequate and predictable financial resources meant to support the efforts of eligible countries are mobilized subsequent to the agreements between the COP and the GEF;
3. To encourage the Global Mechanism to strengthen its activities in assisting African countries in mobilizing resources including those for the co-financing of GEF projects;

4. To encourage the main development partners (bilateral and multilateral), duly to take the UNCCD goals and objectives into account in the framework of their cooperation with African countries;
5. To take appropriate measures aimed at strengthening access to the world market for agricultural products from arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas of Africa;
6. To take appropriate measures with a view to strengthening linkages and synergies with other relevant multilateral treaties by laying emphasis on activities to be undertaken at the local and national levels;
7. To take necessary measures to strengthen capacity building at local, national and subregional levels;
8. To promote the participation of NGOs and CBOs in the implementation of the Convention,

Give mandate to the Chairperson of the African Ministerial Conference preparatory to COP 6 to present this Declaration on the occasion of the High-Level Segment of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Havana, Cuba, from 1 to 2 September 2003.

II. ASIA

A. Conclusions and recommendations of the Sixth Regional Meeting of Asian Focal Points in preparation for the Second Asian Ministerial Conference on UNCCD Implementation and the Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties (7 - 9 June 2003, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates)

The thrust of conclusions and recommendations is articulated in the draft Ministerial Declaration and the document on Priority Activities of the Regional Action Programme for Combating Desertification and Mitigating the Effects of Drought in Asia for 2003 – 2008, submitted for adoption at the subsequent Second Ministerial Conference on UNCCD Implementation, taking place on 10 and 11 June 2003. Country Parties and their partners shall undertake measures to facilitate implementation of policy goals and priority activities which are highlighted in the above-mentioned documents, in line with the commitments and spirit demonstrated at the Regional Meeting of Asian Focal Points and Ministerial Conference from 7 to 11 June 2003.

The Asian representative on the Bureau of the Committee on the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), Mr. Khaled Al-Shaara, introduced the status of progress of the decision-making process following the comprehensive report of the CRIC and provided the secretariat with detailed recommendations from Asian country Parties to be brought to the attention of the CRIC, with a view to integrating these elements in the draft decision to be submitted to CRIC at its second session.

Country Parties in Asia and the Pacific requested the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Environment Facility and its implementing agencies, to provide them at the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 6) to be held in Havana, Cuba, from 25 August to 5 September

2003, with further details on the modalities for implementing the newly-adopted operational programme on sustainable land management (OP 15), with a view to facilitating the implementation of OP 15.

Country Parties in Asia and the Pacific reaffirmed that the host country and task managers of Asian thematic programme networks (TPNs) shall provide updates on their implementation and future work plans at the regional group consultations during the COP 6. Consideration shall be given by the secretariat to the modalities for addressing the issues of coastal land degradation through integration of related components into the existing Asian TPNs or through establishment of a new (seventh) TPN.

Country Parties in Asia and the Pacific considered the dialogue with the private sector at this meeting useful and suggested to the secretariat to organize such dialogues with a variety of representatives of the private sector at appropriate occasions in the future.

B. Conclusions of the Second Asian Ministerial Conference on UNCCD Implementation in Preparation for the Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties (10-11 June 2003, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates)

The representatives at the Conference underlined the vastness and diversity of the ecosystems and natural resources in the Asia – Pacific region, and emphasized the need for close subregional and regional cooperation to deal with the problems of land degradation and desertification. In that pursuit, the Regional Action Programme (RAP), adopted at the First Ministerial Conference in Beijing, China, in 1997, has proven to be a very useful tool for UNCCD implementation in Asia. The Conference fully endorsed the Priority Activities for Implementation of the RAP in 2003-2008, the Abu Dhabi Initiative for Implementation of Priority Activities for the RAP in 2003-2008, and the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration.

The Parties in the Asian and Pacific region highlighted the progress, approaches and experience in the implementation of the UNCCD in their respective countries. Several country Parties announced that their national action programmes (NAPs) have been completed while others indicated that their NAP preparatory processes were underway. The developing country Parties in the region are faced with the need for adequate technical and financial assistance for preparation of their NAPs by 2005.

The Conference welcomed the decision by the Assembly of the Global Environment Facility to designate land degradation as a new focal area and recommended that a decision be made at the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to have the GEF as a financial mechanism for the UNCCD. In this regard, it was underscored that the developing country Parties required further assistance to benefit from GEF operational programmes on integrated ecosystem management and sustainable land management. For this purpose, it was suggested to organize a training course on GEF procedures. While the developing country Parties should strive to seek opportunities provided under the GEF, further assistance is also needed to enable them to meet the GEF's requirement on co-financing.

It was stressed that regional cooperation could catalyze a flow of financial assistance and technology transfer. Further support needs to be given to regional cooperation through thematic

programme networks (TPNs) to achieve practical results. Involvement of civil society, women and the private sector should be more encouraged.

The Pacific island country representatives highlighted their particular needs and challenge, and especially their vulnerability to natural hazards, El Niño, cyclones and coastal land degradation, and urged the secretariat to undertake more activities to support them in facilitating implementation of the Convention. Assistance is required to enable the Pacific island countries to develop their subregional action programme for UNCCD implementation which will focus on early warning systems for drought mitigation and community-based agroforestry and water harvesting in collaboration with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

It was proposed to develop a subregional programme for Northeast Asia in line with the framework of dust and sand storm project. The secretariat was requested to assist the Southeast Asian countries in developing their subregional action programme as a priority activity. Reference was made to the partnership agreement reached between the Global Mechanism, GTZ of Germany and CIDA of Canada to assist Central Asian countries in developing and implementing their subregional action programme.

The following was expressed in the open forum interactive dialogue:

- (i) The priority issues of the region are broadly covered in the priority activities for implementation of the RAP, already elaborated by the meeting of focal points. In view of recurring drought, priority should be given to aridity-induced desertification and land degradation. A reference was made to the need for developing opportunities to market dryland products.
- (ii) Greater efforts and assistance must be given to bolster human and institutional capacity in an integrated and systematic way for multi-stakeholders in the areas such as desertification monitoring and assessment, remote sensing and early warning systems.
- (iii) The partnership building should be promoted to bring relevant stakeholders together toward a common purpose and sharing responsibility in combating desertification. The partnership mechanism should be geared to facilitating resource mobilization and providing concrete results.
- (iv) The need for awareness-raising was emphasized in a way to enhance the involvement of civil society in combating desertification. Involvement of youth in concrete activities for rehabilitating degraded land was encouraged.

With respect to the sixth session of the COP to be held in Havana, Cuba, from 25 August to 5 September 2003, the country representatives have agreed to nominate representatives of China and the United Arab Emirates as the COP 6 Bureau members from Asia.

C. Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration of the Second Asian Ministerial Conference on UNCCD Implementation in Preparation for the Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties (9-11 June 2003, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates)

Preamble

Taking note of the current global membership of 187 Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and of the progress made by the Asian and Pacific country Parties towards promoting regional collaboration as called for by the First Ministerial Conference on UNCCD Implementation held in Beijing, China, in 1997;

Recalling the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) whose outcome includes consideration of the UNCCD as one of the tools for poverty eradication;

Taking note further that the Ministers and heads of international organizations gave due consideration to combating deforestation, desertification and land degradation at the Ministerial Conference on the occasion of the Third World Water Forum held in Kyoto, Japan, in March 2003;

Recalling also that the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), at its eleventh session, adopted its Multi-year Programme of Work in which the topic of desertification is placed among the main issues to be discussed for the years 2008-2009;

Welcoming also the decision taken by the Second Assembly of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), as called for by the WSSD, to designate land degradation (deforestation and desertification) as a new focal area while offering the availability of the GEF to serve as one of the Convention's financial mechanisms should the Parties to the Convention so decide, while recognizing the complementarity between the GEF and the Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD in providing and mobilizing resources for the elaboration and implementation of action programmes;

We, the Ministers and heads of delegations of the Asian and Pacific country Parties to the UNCCD, having met in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 10 and 11 June 2003, resolve the following further to promote progress under the UNCCD Regional Implementation Annex in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity:

Section 1: General considerations

We recognize that desertification pertains to the aggravation of the degradation of land, rendering it unproductive and in many areas inhospitable for settlement. In particular, the scarcity of water in arid and semi-arid areas, the degradation of watersheds and the growing recurrence of prolonged drought, have a severe impact on the livelihoods of the people and their socio-economic development.

We understand that the drylands provide daily subsistence and income for more than half a billion people in Asia, who are amongst among the poorest of the world. We reaffirm that UNCCD should respond directly to the economic, social and environmental challenges relating to poverty

alleviation in vulnerable ecosystems, as a means of achieving the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals.

We consider strengthening of agricultural productivity through sustainable land management to be the backbone of rural development and call for particular attention to the prevention of land degradation together with sustainable livelihood strategies including priority measures for poverty eradication.

We resolve better to actualize the considerable potential of the UNCCD to serve as an effective instrument for combating desertification and land degradation. To date, seventeen countries in the Asian and Pacific region have prepared the national action programmes (NAPs) and efforts must be intensified in the remaining countries as called for by the decision 8/COP.4 of the Conference of the Parties.

We fully recognize that NAP completion and implementation is a priority which must be reflected within appropriate planning frameworks through a consultative process, which should include national focal points, resource allocation ministries, external developed country partners and relevant organizations.

We welcome the emphasis of the Convention on its underlying biophysical and socio-economic aspects and the significant progress made in dealing with them. These have been reflected in the two sets of national reports on implementation of the UNCCD submitted in 2000 and 2002 but we understand that much more remains to be done to involve civil society in facing the long-term challenges of land degradation, desertification and drought.

Section 2: Policy highlights

We have noted that, in spite of intervening measures, the degradation of the ecological base in Asia and the Pacific, compounded by land degradation and water scarcity, is increasing at an alarming rate. Due attention should be given to integrated water resources management programmes, together with preventive measures and renewed efforts in combating land degradation in order to revert this process.

We are encouraged by the success of the rehabilitation measures for degraded lands that have been initiated in Asian and the Pacific countries, which include forest management, soil and water conservation, rangeland management, mountain ecosystem conservation, coastal ecosystem management, early warning systems, drought and other disaster relief system, erosion control, food security and cross-sectoral programmes. We emphasize the need for integrating these measures and contemplating to scale them up at national level through NAPs.

Awareness-raising promotes the stakeholders' ownership of the programmes and their sustainability. Efforts in capacity-building targeting civil society must be expanded to encourage their greater involvement, in particular at the local level. We invite the donor community to support a capacity-building process in the light of the participatory approach proclaimed by the Convention.

The NAPs for combating desertification, mitigating drought impacts and/or rehabilitating degraded land are important policy instruments for facilitating UNCCD implementation at the national level. We invite those affected Asian and Pacific country Parties which are still in the

process of completing their NAPs to accelerate the process with a view to finalize such programmes by no later than at the end of 2005, as called for in the Recife Initiative.

Scientific cooperation under the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) of the UNCCD should be strengthened and its results made available for providing advice and support to decision-makers at the national level. The CST's Group of Experts should develop viable programmes linked to the regional thematic networks. Due consideration should be given to traditional knowledge.

Taking into account the importance of new technologies and know-how for the implementation of the Convention, we invite international agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and developed country Parties to provide Asian and Pacific developing country Parties with further access to such technologies and know-how, particularly those addressing desertification monitoring and assessment and early warning systems. We also invite the private sector to become involved in supporting technological and scientific cooperation.

Section 3: Resource mobilization and partnership building

The Convention expresses a clear commitment to international solidarity and we invite developed country Parties, in the light of progress made, to pursue their undertakings under the Article 6 of the UNCCD.

We reconfirm the high priority of desertification issues and the need for affected country Parties to reflect them in the national development plans and sustainable development strategies, including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, as appropriate. We shall also explore the maximum range of financing arrangements, including private sector participation and the development of mechanisms for public-private partnership.

In view of the new GEF focal area on land degradation and the decision of the GEF Assembly regarding the possibility for the GEF to become a financial mechanism of the UNCCD, if the Parties so decide, we urge the country Parties to the UNCCD to adopt at the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in Havana, Cuba, the decision for the GEF to become a financial mechanism of the UNCCD and to give consequent guidance to the GEF Secretariat.

We also urge the GEF to accelerate support to capacity-building activities, including full cost funding as appropriate, to assist affected country Parties to fulfill their obligations under the Convention under the newly adopted GEF Operational Programme on Sustainable Land Management and invite the implementing agencies of the GEF to respond to this need of Asian parties in a timely fashion.

We commit our respective governments to make further efforts to prepare investment projects under the NAPs of affected country Parties and we request accordingly the GEF implementing agencies and executing agencies with expanded responsibilities to make required arrangements to contribute to the success of our commitment.

In anticipation of the forthcoming business plan of the GM to be presented at the next COP, we reiterate the importance of the GM and call for more concerted support from member institutions of the Facilitation Committee of the GM (and notably the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNEP, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), FAO and the regional banks) to respond to the urgent needs of the Asian and Pacific affected developing country Parties in implementing their NAPs.

The affected country Parties request the GM to intensify mobilizing financial resources in support of the UNCCD, to strive to broaden the funding basis for the UNCCD implementation and to provide advice and information on financing processes through facilitating improved access by the affected country Parties to complementary baseline finance, project proposal and/or pipeline development and co-financing the mobilization of GEF resources.

We emphasize the recommendations of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) for developed country Parties, interested multilateral organizations, the GM, the GEF Secretariat and the UNCCD secretariat to assist Asian and Pacific affected country Parties having finalized their NAPs to set up a country-driven consultative mechanism for predictable partnership building for NAP implementation.

Section 4: Regional and subregional cooperation

We strongly support regional and subregional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, which is necessary to complement the NAP process to combat desertification, and we also agree to strengthen regional and subregional efforts through various forms of partnership arrangements, including the active participation of United Nations regional economic commissions.

We commend the development of the subregional action programme for the West Asian country Parties, on vegetation cover and water, steered by the UNEP in collaboration with the two networks managed by the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Drylands (ACSAD) and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), respectively. We also urge progress in the implementation of a subregional action programme for Central Asian country Parties to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin within the context of the UNCCD. We further note the cooperation arrangement being evolved in North-East Asia, through the efforts of the country Parties, for the prevention and control of dust and sand storms. These programmes should be elaborated further and strengthened by implementing pilot demonstration projects. We also note the call for the development of two subregional action programmes for South-East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific, addressing, as appropriate, the issues of salinization, drought, land degradation, forest and mangrove destruction and coastal erosion. These activities should be developed as elements of the Regional Action Programme (RAP) in 2003-2008.

We consider that the RAP for implementing the UNCCD in Asia and the Pacific, as an outcome of the decision of the Beijing Ministerial Conference, has proved to be a practical and useful catalytic tool in promoting implementation of the UNCCD in the region and note with satisfaction the progress made in establishing the thematic programme networks (TPNs).

At the same time, we observe that, due to the lack of resources, the progress in the activities of subregional and regional activities has been slow and we appeal to the international donor community

to offer financial and technical support to these subregional and regional initiatives, notably through capacity-building activities supported by the GEF.

Section 5: Conclusion

We view this Convention as a unique expression of long-term international solidarity for sustainable development and we thus put an emphasis on the conclusions and recommendations of the first session of the CRIC, aiming at securing predictable financing for the UNCCD process, notably through the GEF.

We endorse the priority activities for the RAP in 2003-2008 to promote UNCCD implementation in Asia and the Pacific, and we urge all international organizations, financing institutions, donor agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations and national stakeholders including governmental institutions to join in its implementation.

We agree to convene the Third Ministerial Conference on the UNCCD Implementation in Asia and the Pacific at such time deemed necessary by the Asian and the Pacific country Parties to the UNCCD.

We express our gratitude and deep appreciation to the Government of the United Arab Emirates for generously hosting the Second Asian Ministerial Conference on UNCCD Implementation in Preparation for the Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties, for extending its warm hospitality and for the excellent organizational arrangements.

D. Abu Dhabi Initiative for Implementation of the Priority Activities for the Regional Action Programme in 2003 – 2008

The Abu Dhabi initiative for the implementation of the priority activities of national, subregional and regional significance for selected thematic areas within the framework of the RAP in 2003 – 2008 is proposed to promote combating desertification. This initiative is to be implemented by project-based funding taking into account the following considerations and the annex:

Stressing the importance of implementing the commitments set out in the UNCCD through the Regional Action Programme (RAP) on the basis of a common concept defined by the first Asian regional meeting held in New Delhi, India, in 1996, and the First Asian Ministerial Conference on UNCCD held in Beijing, China, in 1997;

Taking into account the regional initiatives and platform for Asia and the Pacific which were highlighted in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), adopted in 2002;

Referring to subregional action programmes in West Asia, Central Asia, North East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific;

Being aware that the implementation of RAP, since its inception in 1997, is progressing slowly, yet positively and sometimes substantially;

Referring to the Abu Dhabi Declaration on the Future of Arab Environmental Action (2001), the Arab Declaration on Sustainable Development (2002) and the Arab Sustainable Development Initiative (2002), endorsed by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), and tabled at the WSSD;

Observing the positive developments in the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for combating desertification and land degradation that should be supplemented by the Global Mechanism's activities concerning the financing of the Convention;

Taking account of the development witnessed by academic and research institutions in countries of the region in the field of land degradation and water resources deterioration;

The representatives at the Second Asian Ministerial Conference on UNCCD Implementation decided to promote actions:

- (i) To prepare project proposals in the priority areas with the close involvement of the participating country Parties, giving the cost estimates and identifying components for multi-donor involvement,
- (ii) To give priority to the implementation of the RAP in the light of the high importance attached to the issues of land degradation and water scarcity, particularly for:
 - (a) Integrated management of water resources,
 - (b) Land degradation and combating desertification;
- (iii) To make use of expertise and experience of country Parties in the region in the field of land degradation control and integrated water resources management through exchange of expertise among country Parties of the region,
- (iv) To provide required support to research and academic institutions to contribute to devising mechanisms and suitable solutions for tackling water stress and land degradation,
- (v) To develop capabilities in country Parties of the region in the field of meteorology and to build early warning systems to contribute to prevention or mitigation of emergency drought cases,
- (vi) To disseminate technology available in the area of remote sensing for monitoring land degradation and vegetation cover in terms of quality and coverage,
- (vii) To explore the possibility of financial support from bilateral and multilateral sources, as well as the private sector,
- (viii) To invite the GEF implementing agencies (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank) and executing agencies with expanded responsibilities (such as Asian Development

Bank (ADB), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) to assist the developing country Parties in formulating and preparing GEF project proposals relating to land degradation and desertification as provided for in Operational Programme 12 on Integrated Ecosystem Management and Operational Programme 15 on Sustainable Land Management,

- (ix) To promote coordination of the project implementation through currently established mechanisms, such as the national focal points (NFPs), national coordinating bodies (NCBs), TPNs and subregional bodies, in the light of the underlying responsibility of the country Parties, with advice to be provided by the international organizations including the UNCCD secretariat, World Meteorological Organization (WMO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNEP, UNDP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), as well as other GEF implementing and executing agencies with expanded responsibilities.
- (x) To urge the national governments of the country Parties participating in the projects to establish steering committees under the coordination of the focal points,
- (xi) To invite organizations of the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations to join as partners in the implementation of the projects;
- (xii) To encourage the Asian country Parties to participate in the implementation of projects in order to promote South-South cooperation, particularly Asia-Africa cooperation through measures such as launching the Asia-Africa Research, Development and Training Centre for Combating Desertification (RDTC);
- (xiii) To request the host country of the Conference, the United Arab Emirates, in line with the success in their national efforts in combating desertification, to provide support to this initiative in the spirit of South-South cooperation.

Annex

1. Context

Desertification and land degradation feature in different forms in the Asian region, as would any measures for combating these phenomena. Aridity is a severe problem in the dry areas, particularly during the dry season in most of Asia. The scarcity of water and unsustainable land management with resulting loss of vegetation covers rank high in the list of priorities. Agroforestry offers a good potential for fighting land degradation in Asia. Sustainable management of rangeland and prevention and control of dust and sandstorms are priorities considering their economic and health impacts. The projects for the pilot initiative should be developed bearing in mind these priorities for implementation as catalytic activities at the national, subregional and regional levels. Desertification monitoring and assessment and the establishment of a network for information sharing are important tools for diagnosing the root causes of desertification and finding proper controlling measures.

2. Objectives

The objectives are:

- (i) To demonstrate the successful development of measures for combating desertification and land degradation and to promote the replication of successful case studies;
- (ii) To enhance active involvement of youth, women and other active groups of civil society in participating in combating desertification and land degradation through pilot field projects; and
- (iii) To facilitate the optimum development of the regional network on desertification monitoring and assessment using advanced technologies.

3. Project concept areas

The project concept areas that are in line with TPNs and thematic networks (TNs) are as follows:

- (i) Development and application of common desertification monitoring and assessment indicators and standardization of the database on the extent of desertification and its socio-economic impacts in Asia;
- (ii) Promotion of revegetation, agroforestry and soil conservation at the field level;
- (iii) Community level water resources management techniques, recycling of waste water for plantation and agriculture;
- (iv) Pilot demonstration projects for rangeland management, control of sand dunes and management of coastal land;
- (v) Prevention and control of dust and sandstorms;
- (vi) Reducing the impacts of drought in Asia, including El Niño-induced drought in the Pacific islands through the establishment of early warning systems and the development of appropriate policy for drought preparedness and risk management; and
- (vii) Assisting rural farmers of affected developing countries in better marketing their produce and products at the local, national and international levels as an incentive for promoting sustainable land management and increasing income generating opportunities as part of efforts for eradicating poverty.

III. LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

A. Decisions made at the Ninth Regional Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean country Parties to the UNCCD (Bogotá, Colombia, 18 to 20 June 2003)

Decision 1: Agenda of work for NAP implementation in the LAC countries 2003-2005

Recalling articles 9 and 10 of the Convention and article 3 of Annex III to the Convention;

Recalling decision 8/COP.4 referring to the Declaration on the commitments to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention inviting affected developing country Parties to accelerate the process of preparation and implementation of NAPs to have them completed by the end 2005 at the latest;

Welcoming the establishment of a joint programme between the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism to better respond to the needs of affected country Parties, notably at the national level;

Bearing in mind that the Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean adopted at their Seventh Regional Meeting decision 1 reaffirming their commitment to have their NAPs prepared by 2005 and calling on the secretariat to fulfil its mandate in this regard;

Noting that at their Eighth Regional Meeting Parties were encouraged to make every effort to ensure that their NAPs are completed by the 2005 deadline as identified by decision 8/COP.4;

Cognisant of the fact that only seven country Parties in the region have completed and adopted their NAPs to date;

Parties attending this meeting decide:

a) To reaffirm the willingness of LAC country Parties to reach their goal set up in decision 8/COP.4,

b) To call to the secretariat, the Global Mechanism, GEF, UNEP, UNDP and all other pertinent international agencies, as well as donor and cooperation countries, to ensure the compliance of the commitments of developed country Parties to assign, in a predictable and concrete manner, the appropriate necessary resources to ensure the compliance with the agreed deadline,

c) To give priority to the following activities which shall be executed by 2005:

Priority /Activity	Expected date
<i>National awareness seminars in the remaining four LAC countries:</i> Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago	December 2003
<i>NAP preparation in ten countries:</i> Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Honduras, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, Uruguay	March 2004
<i>NAP completion / validation in twelve countries:</i> Brazil, Barbados, Colombia ¹ , Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Venezuela	March 2004
<i>NAP completion / validation in fourteen countries (after first two activities above have been completed):</i> Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay	Second half of 2004
<i>Donor consultations for NAP implementation:</i> Round table of donors organised in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolivia • Peru • Argentina 	2003-2004 2004 2003-2004

Decision 2: Activities of the Regional Action Programme for the five-year period 2003-2007

Recalling that the Conference of the Parties at its first session in Rome, Italy, in October 1997 adopted decision 12/COP.1 to support the RAP for LAC;

Noting that the LAC Parties approved the RAP in 1997 in order to promote the implementation of the Convention at the regional level;

Cognisant of the dynamic nature of the implementation process in the region,

Bearing in mind the need for including ecosystem and cross-cutting approaches as well as the need to strengthen training and capacity-building activities,

Aware of the achievements made in the implementation of the RAP to date and relying on the participation of civil society organisations,

Considering the discussions on RAP conducted during this Meeting,

¹ The date and venue will be conditioned upon the availability of resources.

Parties attending this meeting decide:

- a) To approve the activities of the LAC RAP for the five-year period 2003-2007 included as annex I to these decisions,
- b) To adopt the creation of six thematic programmes which shall be known henceforth as thematic programme networks, as follows:

TPN 1: Identification and use of benchmarks and indicators of desertification and drought,

TPN 2: Information Network on Desertification and Drought (DESELAC),

TPN 3: Integrated water resource management and water efficiency programmes,

TPN 4: Promotion of agroforestry and combating poverty,

TPN 5: Best practices, traditional knowledge and technologies,

TPN 6: Promotion of sustainable renewable energy.

- c) To approve the Programme of Work for the biennium 2003-2004 which is enclosed in annex II

Decision 3: Regional Coordination Unit

Taking into account decisions 3/COP.3, 4/COP.4 and 6/COP.5 on the review of the initiative relating to the Regional Coordination Units;

Recognising the role of the Regional Coordination Units as appropriate tool to implement the Convention in different affected regions;

Noting that, to date, efforts have not been reviewed by the Conferences of the Parties;

Considering that LAC region has given priority to its establishment, as expressed in Annex III to the Convention, whose article 7(b) provides for a coordinating mechanism among national focal points with the following objectives:

- (i) to exchange information and experiences,
- (ii) to coordinate action at the regional and subregional level,
- (iii) to promote technical, scientific, technological and financial cooperation,
- (iv) to identify requirements for external cooperation, and
- (v) to follow up and assess the implementation of action programmes;

Considering that it is imperative to have a discussion paper not only under the “Programme and budget” agenda item but also as an item in the COP agenda to discuss on the “need for, modalities for, and feasibility and possible terms of reference of the Regional Coordination Units”;

Taking into account that including this topic under the “Programme and budget” agenda item only, as it appears on the COP 6 provisional agenda, does not satisfy the requirement of decision 6/COP.5;

Recognizing that, in spite of financial constraints and institutional weakness, the activity of the Regional Coordination Unit has proved to be a useful and positive experience for the region;

Parties attending this meeting decide:

- a) To request the President of the Regional Executive Committee, in agreement with the Chairperson of GRULAC during COP 6, to propose inclusion of the item on the need for, modalities for, and feasibility and possible terms of reference of the Regional Coordination Units as an item on the COP agenda;
- b) To request the LAC representatives to the Bureau of the COP 6, at the time of approving the agenda, to submit the inclusion of a new topic on the need for, modalities for, and feasibility and possible terms of reference of the Regional Coordination Units, according to decision 6/COP.5.

Decision 4: GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD

Noting that adequate financial resources for the implementation of the UNCCD should be secured in the aftermath of the WSSD so as to contribute to the eradication of rural poverty, particularly in the vulnerable arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid ecosystems;

Recognizing the stated readiness of the GEF to become a financial mechanism of the UNCCD;

Welcoming the adoption of GEF's OP 15 on sustainable land management;

Parties attending this meeting decide:

- a) To express appreciation of LAC country Parties at the sixth session of the COP for the GEF offer to act as a financial mechanism of the Convention and recommend its adoption by the Parties;
- b) To request the Global Mechanism to continue playing its important role in mobilizing financial resources and broadening the funding basis for the UNCCD in complement to GEF funding;
- c) To underline that the funding of enabling activities under OP 15, conceived as actions undertaken by affected developing Parties to fulfil their obligations under the Convention, constitutes an essential component of the expected support from the GEF to the Parties as a means to enhance its support to the implementation of the Convention;
- d) To invite the GEF implementing agencies to contribute actively to the implementation of this Operational Programme, while fully taking into account the need to finance activities prioritized by affected developing country Parties to fulfil their obligations under the Convention;
- e) To call upon GEF executing agencies, including regional development banks, as well as UNCCD secretariat to initiate internal actions aimed at adapting their operations according to the OP 15 programme of implementation;
- f) To request, in this context, the UNCCD secretariat to organize, in close cooperation with GEF implementing agencies, training workshops for UNCCD national focal points on GEF procedures and projects formulation in the framework of OP 15, while also taking into consideration opportunities offered under the OP 12.

- g) To urge the secretariat to adopt the necessary measures for capacity building in the country Parties in order to facilitate their access to OP 15.

Decision 5: Second session of the CRIC

Taking in consideration decision 1/COP.5 on the CRIC;

Bearing in mind the conclusions and recommendations made at CRIC 1;

Parties attending this meeting decide:

- a) To request the secretariat to forward to the Chairperson of the CRIC the recommendations from the LAC country Parties on decisions to be taken by the COP 6 with reference to the final report of CRIC 1.

Decision 6: Vulnerability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Recognizing the importance of CRIC 1 recommendations on SIDS included in its final report, on the basis of the growing vulnerability of SIDS as it relates to land degradation and drought;

Considering the St. George's Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

Taking into account the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted by the WSSD, and particular emphasis given to SIDS;

Recalling the resolution 57/262 of the United Nations General Assembly and its decision to convene an international meeting, including a high-level segment, in 2004 in Mauritius, for a full and comprehensive review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS;

Also recalling the decision to convene regional and interregional preparatory meetings of SIDS;

Welcoming, in accordance with paragraph 7 of United Nations General Assembly resolution 57/262, the regional preparatory meeting for the Caribbean SIDS, to be held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, from 18 to 22 August 2003;

Recalling the Resolution adopted by CSD 11 on the Preparations for the International Meeting to Review Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS;

Parties attending the meeting decide:

- a) To reiterates the need to assist the SIDS with the necessary technical and financial resources for the design and application of instruments essential to the implementation of the Convention, such as national, subregional and regional action programmes;
- b) To invite governments and participants at the sixth session of the COP to give due attention to the outcomes of the regional preparatory meeting for the Caribbean SIDS as an important step in the preparatory process leading to the International Meeting to Review Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS;
- c) To encourage governments and participants at the sixth session of the COP also to address, within the thematic cluster of issues at that session, matters related to desertification and drought as key component for the sustainable development of SIDS;
- d) To recommend to governments and participants at the sixth session of the COP to adopt a decision on the importance of addressing issues relating to desertification and drought for consideration by the International Meeting to Review Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS.

Decision 7: Committee on Science and Technology (CST)

Considering the important role played by the CST, established by decision 15/COP.1;

Bearing in mind the Committee's evolution of the themes under the Convention;

Noting the decision considering the need to improve its efficiency and effectiveness;

Recognizing the need to secure the inclusion of Committee's recommendations in the NAPs, SRAPs and RAP;

Cognisant of decision 17/COP.5 on the creation of the Group of Experts and the limited participation of LAC countries in the CST roster of experts;

Parties attending this meeting decide:

- a) To call upon countries in the process of NAP preparation to include CST decisions in the mentioned programmes and in the national reports,
- b) To request the region's support to the process of improvement of efficiency and effectiveness of the CST;
- c) To ask LAC countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Cuba) having representatives in the Group of Experts to provide full support to the work of these experts;
- d) To encourage country Parties of the region to submit their nominations for the CST roster of experts prior to COP 7 so as to strengthen the presence of the region and increase in their number, in relevant areas established by the Committee;

e) To recognize the common interests of the LAC country Parties with the Work Programme of the Group of Experts acting in favour of the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness of the CST, particularly in the following areas:

- Benchmarks and indicators
- Traditional knowledge
- Land degradation
- Early warning systems
- Synergy among environmental conventions
- Water resources

Decision 8: Date and venue of the Tenth Regional Meeting

Bearing in mind that regional meetings are hosted on a system of rotation among the four LAC subregions, namely Andean, Mesoamerica, South America and the Caribbean;

Noting that, based upon this system, it is the prerogative of the Mesoamerican subregion to host the next Regional Meeting;

Taking note of the proposal from the Government of Guatemala to host the Tenth Regional Meeting;

Considering that the Tenth Regional Meeting will prepare the Parties for the third session of the CRIC;

Reaffirming the right of each Party in the region to host the Regional Meeting,

Parties attending this meeting decide:

- a) To accept the offer made by Guatemala;
- b) To request the secretariat to make the necessary arrangements with the host country for ensuring timely and successful holding of the Tenth LAC Regional Meeting.

Decision 9: Composition of the Regional Executive Committee

Cognisant of Decision 15 of the Sixth Regional Meeting on the composition of the Regional Executive Committee;

Recognizing the work accomplished by the outgoing Regional Executive Committee;

Reaffirming their conviction of the importance of the role the Regional Executive Committee must play in helping to coordinate activities aimed at better implementation of the Convention in the region,

Parties attending this meeting decide:

The composition of the Regional Executive Committee will be as follows:

- President: Colombia
- Vice-president: Barbados
- A representative of Mesoamerica: Costa Rica
- A representative of the Southern Cone: Brazil
- An additional representative of the Caribbean: Dominican Republic
- A representative of RIOD, as an observer

Decision 10: Acknowledgement to the cooperation partners

The representatives of governments, intergovernmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations attending the Ninth LAC Regional Meeting of the UNCCD hosted in the city of Bogotá, Colombia, from 17 to 20 June 2003;

Cognisant and appreciative of the support that the governments of Italy and Spain have given to the holding of this Meeting;

Being aware of the significant support that the Government of Germany has provided for specific projects in the region such as in Mesoamerica, the Caribbean and in South America, and its continuing commitment to efforts aimed at achieving sustainable development and the protection of the environment;

Noting the role played by international and regional agencies and institutions and their support to the implementation process under the Regional Implementation Annex for LAC;

Parties attending this meeting decide:

- a) To express their sincere gratitude to the governments of Italy and Spain for their support to the holding of the Ninth LAC Regional Meeting;
- b) To express, on behalf of the peoples and governments of LAC, sincere thanks to the Government of Germany for its support to the regional implementation process;
- c) To request the mentioned governments and other cooperation countries to continue supporting the region in its efforts to achieve sustainable development through the implementation of decisions taken at this Regional Meeting.

Decision 11: Acknowledgement to the Government and the people of Colombia

The representatives of the governments, international and regional organizations and agencies and non-governmental organizations attending the Ninth LAC Regional Meeting of the UNCCD, held in the city of Bogotá, Colombia, from 17 to 20 June 2003;

Considering the deliberations of this Meeting and cognisant of the efforts of the people and Government of Colombia in ensuring the success of the same;

Parties attending this meeting decide:

To express their gratitude to the people and government of Colombia for the generous hospitality extended during this Regional Meeting.

Annex I

The LAC RAP 2003-2007

PROGRAMMATIC AXES	ACTIVITIES	GOALS
1: UNCCD implementation at the national level (i.e. NAPs and related activities)	1.1. Support to the organization of awareness raising seminars.	To start NAP process in Bahamas, Belize, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago.
	1.2. Support to NAP preparation.	To prepare NAPs in Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Honduras, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam and Uruguay. (Also the countries mentioned in 1.1.)
	1.3. Supplementary support to NAP validation.	To complete and/or validate NAPs in Brazil, Barbados, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela. (Also the countries mentioned in 1.1. and 1.2.)
	1.4. Support to NAP implementation	To advance in NAP implementation in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru.
	1.5. Support to the preparation of national reports	To ensure LAC national reports submission before the CRIC 4 and the further ones.
2: UNCCD implementation at the transnational ecosystems level (i.e. SRAPs and related activities)	2.1. Support to the design and implementation of the Gran Chaco Americano SRAP	To consolidate the formulation and implementation process of the SRAP Chaco (Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay)
	2.2. Support to the design and implementation of the Puna Americana SRAP	To consolidate the formulation and implementation process of the SRAP Puna (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru)
	2.3. Support to the design and implementation of the Hispaniola SRAP	To consolidate the formulation and implementation process of the SRAP Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic)
	2.4. Support to the design of the Caribbean SRAP	To formulate the Caribbean SRAP
	2.5. Support to the design of the Mesoamerica SRAP	To formulate the Mesoamerica SRAP

PROGRAMMATIC AXES	ACTIVITIES	GOALS
3: Programmes and cross-cutting activities implementation	3.1. Benchmarks and indicators (TPN 1) Launch of a regional programme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination with past and existent initiatives in the region 	To have a system of indicators at the regional level that enables the assessment of the desertification processes and their evolution in the region.
	3.2. DESELAC information electronic network (TPN 2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website design and launch. • Support to the national focal points equipment. • Training in the use of the Web site and its tools. 	To have a communication and information tool linking all relevant stakeholders and actors in the UNCCD implementation process in LAC.
	3.3. Integrated water resource management (TPN 3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of a regional programme • Coordination with past and existent initiatives in the region. • Organization of exchange seminars and/or workshops. • Execution of pilot projects. 	To promote sustainable policies on the use of the water resource in the countries of the region.
	3.4. Promotion of agroforestry to combat desertification and eradicate poverty (TPN 4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of a regional programme. • Coordination with past and existent initiatives in the region. • Organization of exchange seminars and/or workshops. • Execution of pilot projects. 	To promote sustainable policies related to the use of natural resources, focusing on poor small producers in rural areas.
	3.5. Best practices, traditional knowledge and technologies (TPN 5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of a regional programme. • Coordination with past and existent initiatives in the region. • Execution of pilot projects. 	To have an inventory of best practices, traditional knowledge and technologies, that can be replicated in each country of the region.
	3.6. Renewable energies (TPN 6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of a regional programme. • Coordination with past and existent initiatives in the region. • Organization of exchange seminars and/or workshops. • Execution of pilot projects. 	To promote the use of alternative and sustainable energy sources in the countries of the region.

PROGRAMMATIC AXES	ACTIVITIES	GOALS
	3.7. Promotion of synergies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a regional programme. • Coordination with past and existent initiatives in the region. • Organization of exchange seminars and/or workshops (at the national and subregional level). • Execution of pilots projects. 	To promote activities linking the different environmental conventions in the countries of the region.
	3.8. Studies on drought <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching of a regional programme. • Coordination with past and existent initiatives in the region. • Organization of exchange seminars and/or workshops. • Execution of pilots projects. 	To promote the exchange of information on drought, particularly on early warning systems.
	3.9. Professional training and strengthening of national focal points. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of a NFP support programme, together with UNV. • Design of a training programme on negotiation skills, addressed to decision-makers, governmental and non-governmental technicians. • Training courses on GEF projects design, addressed to governmental and non-governmental technicians. • Design of a proposal concerning the training and the empowerment of civil society entities. 	To strengthen organisational and technical abilities of the participants in combating desertification and implementing the Convention.
	3.10. Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional comparative study on education and desertification. • Draft proposal for the integration of desertification and sustainable development issues in primary school curricula. • Proposal for the organization of a post-graduate regional course on desertification. 	To incorporate didactic content relating to dry lands sustainable development in primary educational programmes. To improve technical training of the professionals engaged in the combat against desertification.
	3.11 Public policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative study on policies related to sustainable development. 	To have information on national public policies relating to sustainable development, which can be replicated in the countries of the region.

PROGRAMMATIC AXES	ACTIVITIES	GOALS
	3.12. Financial aspects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round tables with donor organizations and cooperation partners • Training courses on GEF projects design addressed to governmental and non-governmental technicians. • Elaboration of a study on the payment for environmental services as a strategy to combat desertification. 	To promote the information on available financing sources for the implementation of programmes and initiatives within the UNCCD framework implementation in the countries of the region.
	3.13. Gender and desertification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching of a regional programme. • Coordination with past and existent initiatives in the region. • Organization of exchange seminars and/or workshops. • Execution of pilots projects. 	To promote activities promoting the incorporation of gender issues in the implementation of the UNCCD in the countries of the region.
4: Horizontal cooperation within the UNCCD framework	4.1. Cooperation platform Africa – LAC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot projects implementation on soil salinization in Cuba, Mali and Venezuela. 	To promote the exchange of experience and knowledge among affected countries in Africa and LAC.
	4.2. Horizontal cooperation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of exchange projects between the countries of the region and/or with other regions. 	To promote the exchange of experiences and knowledge among affected countries.

Annex II

ACTIVITIES FOR THE BIENNIUM 2003 - 2004

RAP REFERENCE		ACTIVITIES	INDICATIVE DATE
PROGRAMMATIC AXES	ACTIVITY		
1. UNCCD implementation at national level	1.1. Awareness seminars	Awareness seminars in: • Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago	December 2003
	1.2. NAP preparation	NAP preparation in: • Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Honduras, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, Uruguay	March 2004
		• Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago	June 2004
	1.3. NAP completion and validation	NAP completion and validation in: • Antigua y Barbuda, Brazil, Barbados, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Venezuela	March 2004
		• Grenada, Honduras, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, Uruguay	August 2004
		• Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago	December 2004
	1.4. NAP implementation	Round table of donors organized in: • Peru • Bolivia • Argentina	May 2004 July 2004 September 2004
	1.4. NAP implementation	Support to the implementation of NAPs in: • Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico	2003-2004
		Support for civil society initiatives in the framework of the exchange and training programme	2003-2004

2. UNCCD implementation at transnational ecosystems level	2.1. Chaco SRAP	Implementation of the Gran Chaco Americano SRAP (SRAP consolidation, development of a project portfolio, etc.)	2003-2004
		Presentation of the Sustainable Development of the Gran Chaco Americano proposal at the GEF.	October 2003
		Presentation of the Integrated Management and Sustainable Development of the Gran Chaco Americano proposal at the AICD.	June 2003
		Implementation of a civil society initiative on experience exchange and land degradation prevention in the Argentina Chaco.	August 2003
		Implementation of three micro-credit initiatives in Gran Chaco Americano SRAP.	October 2003
	2.2. Puna SRAP	Implementation of the Puna Americana SRAP (SRAP consolidation, development of a project portfolio, etc.)	2003-2004
		Presentation of the Traditional Knowledge Strengthening to Combat Desertification and Poverty in Rural Communities in the Puna Americana proposal at the AICD.	June 2003
		Presentation of the Puna Americana (Food Security Component) proposal at FAO (Italian Trust Fund).	June 2003
		Implementation of three micro-credit initiatives in Puna Americana SRAP.	October 2003
	2.3. Hispaniola SRAP	Support to the PANFRO Program of the Hispaniola SRAP (Haiti and Dominican Republic)	March 2004
		Presentation of the Artibonito proposal and the Benchmarks and Indicators proposal at the AICD.	June 2003
		Preparation of proposals to be submitted to the GEF.	June 2004
	2.4. Caribbean SRAP	Preparation of proposal and preliminary launching of the Caribbean SRAP	December 2004
		Preparation of a proposal to be submitted to the FAO Technical Cooperation.	August 2003

	2.5. Mesoamerica SRAP	Preparation of proposal and preliminary launching of the Mesoamerica SRAP.	December 2004
3. UNCCD implementation through crosscutting activities and programmes, with emphasis on poverty eradication	3.1. Benchmarks and indicators (TPN 1)	Benchmarks and Indicators Regional Programme launch.	June 2003
	3.2. DESELAC (TPN 2)	Web site design and launching.	June 2003
	3.3. Water management (TPN 3)	Integrated Water Resource Management Programme launch.	June 2004
	3.4. Agro-forestry (TPN 4)	Promotion of Agro-forestry and Combating Poverty Programme launch.	June 2004
		Development of a proposal for project design on poverty reduction.	June 2004
	3.5. Traditional knowledge (TPN 5)	Best Practices on Traditional Knowledge and Technologies Programme launch.	April 2004
	3.6. Sustainable renewable energy (TPN 6)	Sustainable Renewable Energy Programme launch.	July 2004
	3.7. Synergies	Organization of workshops on synergies in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argentina • Brazil • Mesoamerica subregion • Caribbean subregion 	Nov. 2003 Nov. 2003 March 2004 October 2004
		Pilot project "Youth and Environment" launching, in Argentina.	September 2003
	3.9. Training	Launch of the initiative for strengthening national coordinating bodies (UNV Project)	January 2004
		Organization of two exchange forum on UNCCD implementation in the GEF framework in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mesoamerica • The Caribbean 	December 2003 February 2004

		Organization of a training activity on GEF project preparation.	March 2004
		Building capacities for negotiating in the national and international forums of sustainable development conventions	December 2004
		Building capacities at the NGO level. Strengthening of the RIOD-LAC network	April 2004
	3.11. Public policies	Public Policies Harmonization Project in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mexico • Barbados (starting) • Nicaragua (starting) 	2003-2004 August 2003 Sept. 2003
	3.12. Financial aspects	Initiative on environmental services in drylands	2003-2004
		Initiative on debt swaps through a project in Peru.	December 2003
	3.13. Gender and desertification	Launching of a Gender and Desertification Programme	December 2004
	4. Cooperation within the UNCCD framework		
	4.1. Cooperation platform Africa-LAC	Implementation of three projects on soil salinization, in the framework of the Cooperation Platform Africa – LAC, in Cuba, Mali and Venezuela.	2005
	4.2. Horizontal cooperation	Implementation of the second phase of the South-South initiative between Cuba, Dominican Republic and Haiti with the purpose of strengthening capacities on the NAP process.	November 2003
		Implementation of a South-South exchange initiative between Cuba and the countries from Central America with the purpose of strengthening capacities on the NAP process.	November 2003
		Attendance of LAC experts in the MEDRAP initiative.	2003-2004

IV. NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

A. Input from the Second Regional Meeting of Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties in preparation for COP 6 (10-11 July 2003, Geneva, Switzerland)

The participants to the Regional Meeting took note with satisfaction of the current global membership of 187 Parties to the UNCCD, of the expanded membership of Central and Eastern European countries and of the progress made by the Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern European affected country Parties towards preparing and implementing their NAPs, as well as promoting regional collaboration.

The participants underlined the importance of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation that recognized the UNCCD as one of the tools for poverty eradication; and welcomed the decision taken by the Second Assembly of the GEF, as called for by the WSSD, to designate land degradation (deforestation and desertification) as a new focal area and recognize the importance of these developments for the decision-making process of affected country Parties.

Furthermore, they welcomed the decision of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, at its eleventh session, to place the topic of desertification among the main issues to be discussed for the years 2008-2009, in accordance with the Multi-year Programme of Work of the Commission.

The participants to the Meeting noted that, in spite of intervening measures, land degradation, caused by soil loss by erosion, and decline of organic matter content is increasing in the Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern Europe.

The participants emphasized the importance of approaching the questions relating to land resources in an integrated manner, through coordinated action and cooperation at all levels, and highlighted the need for integrating the measures already taken, particularly in the context of the European Union, into the Convention process, and contemplating to scale them up at national level through the NAPs.

The wish was expressed to strengthen and clarify the linkages between the European Soil Strategy and the UNCCD, both at the levels of scientific exchanges (CST) and of action programming process.

The participants, while recalling the comprehensive assessment of the UNCCD process conducted by the Parties during the first session of the CRIC, recognized the considerable potential of the UNCCD for promoting the coherence of policies and measures relating to the sustainable use, planning and management of land resources, and resolved to actualize better this potential.

The participants welcomed the substantive report of their representative on the bureau of the CRIC, Mr. Franco Micieli de Biase, establishing linkages between the CRIC 1 report and the follow-up process to draft COP 6 decisions, and focusing on possible elements that could be included in the draft decisions. They requested the secretariat to forward this communication to the Chairperson of the CRIC for his consideration and appropriate action.

The necessity to strengthen linkages between the implementation and scientific processes under the Convention was emphasized. This would include ongoing contacts between the officers of the respective subsidiary organs, an increased involvement of the scientific community in implementation-oriented activities, the enhanced possibility for the TPNs, through a bottom-up approach, to expand the outreach of measures advocated under the CST and the sustained contribution of the CST for synergies development among the Rio conventions.

The participants noted the need to promote, in coordination with relevant international scientific agencies and programmes, activities to improve the existing level of scientific knowledge on desertification and land degradation and ways and means to apply this knowledge.

The CST should promote scientific cooperation and ensure that the scientific results be made available to provide support to decision-makers at all levels and to establish appropriate linkages with the ongoing implementation processes. The importance of access to technologies and know-how, particularly those addressing land degradation/desertification monitoring and early warning systems was emphasized.

The participants supported the newly established Group of Experts, recognizing the important role the Group could play. They noted that, in order to ensure that the Group fully fulfills its role, appropriate means should be allocated to it.

The participants recommended the enhancement of competent NGO participation in the work of the CST, in order for this body to fully harness the wealth of knowledge gathered by civil society in the UNCCD implementation, and to add more socio-economic data to its reports.

Synergies between the Rio conventions must be pursued at national, regional and international levels. Parties and international financing instruments, in particular GEF, should support synergy-oriented programs and projects, notably in the field of agro-forestry and soil conservation. At the national level, coordination and collaboration among responsible institutions for the implementation of the Rio conventions should be encouraged.

To date, seven European country Parties have prepared their NAPs and, taking into account the Recife Initiative and the Bonn Declaration, efforts must be intensified in the remaining affected country Parties as called for by the decision 8/COP.4 to complete all NAPs by 2005.

In view of the decision of the GEF Assembly regarding the possibility for the GEF to become a financial mechanism of the UNCCD, Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern European country Parties invite the country Parties to the UNCCD to take the necessary steps during COP 6 for the GEF to respond to the need of the UNCCD for more predictable programming and funding identified during the first session of the CRIC.

The participants also supported targeted GEF assistance to cover capacity-building activities, including funding to assist affected country Parties to fulfill their obligations under the Convention and to support the UNCCD process under the newly adopted GEF Operational Programme on Sustainable Land Management.

The GM should continue to support affected country Parties to mainstream the NAPs into national development frameworks, especially PRSPs, where applicable. The participants reiterated the importance of the GM for facilitating resource mobilization in complement with the GEF. They called for a more concerted support from member institutions of the Facilitation Committee of the GM, as well as other relevant members of the donor community such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, to respond to the urgent needs of the eligible European country Parties in implementing the Convention.

The participants noted that the scope of the GM partnership with the Annexes IV and V country Parties would include the following: (a) sharing of information on sources of funds and approaches to partnership building and resource mobilization for UNCCD implementation; and (b) promotion of technical and financial cooperation.

The participants noted the launching of cooperation between the GM and countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and invited the GM, in a joint effort with the secretariat, to enhance further its support to affected country Parties of Annex V in preparing and implementing their NAPs through setting up of a country-driven consultative mechanism for predictable partnership building. Political will of affected country Parties and committed participation of bilateral and multilateral donors to this process are key to its success.

The participants welcomed the information presented by the Regional Environmental Center on its activities relating to public participation and its role in the UNCCD process.

NGO cooperation with the national focal points is key to the improved performance of these two major stakeholders, and to the production of high quality national reports, encompassing more of the social dimension of implementation. The participants therefore call on the Parties to take appropriate steps, and development partners to provide assistance, for ensuring enhanced cooperation between NGOs and national focal points.

The representatives of Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern European country Parties requested the secretariat to continue to facilitate regional and subregional/ transboundary cooperation in Europe in order to complement the NAP process.

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