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**REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION AND OF
ITS INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 22,
PARAGRAPHS 2 (a) AND (b), AND ARTICLE 26 OF THE CONVENTION**

**REVIEW OF THE REPORT ON ENHANCED IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE CONVENTION**

Note by the secretariat*

* Submission of this document has been held back so that the most up-to-date information regarding enhancement of the implementation of the Convention obligations can be submitted to the Conference of the Parties.

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Summary

At its fourth session, held in Bonn, Germany, in December 2000, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification approved the text of a declaration committing parties to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention.

Pursuant to decision 8/COP.4 of the Conference of the Parties, the present document provides a compilation and a summary of the information contained in the reports submitted up to 2002 by parties and covers measures taken in the seven strategic areas defined in the Declaration.

The document highlights salient points for each region drawn from the reports submitted. In its general conclusion and recommendations relating to progress in the main strategic areas, the Conference of the Parties is invited to take decisions which will promote the thorough and effective follow-up of the provisions of the Declaration, in the context of the implementation of the Convention.

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I. CONTEXT

1. The ministers and heads of delegation participating in the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties adopted the Declaration on the commitments to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention. They stressed that, given the scale of land degradation processes and the wide range of local and regional situations, desertification had become a global challenge. They reaffirmed their political commitment to revitalizing the process of implementing the Convention, so as to attain the sound results necessary for tackling the problems of land degradation and natural resource management on a global scale.
2. The Declaration identified specific measures to improve the system of evaluating efforts to implement the Convention and set a time frame of 10 years (2001-2010) to enable parties to step up efforts to give new impetus to the campaign against desertification. The Declaration also encouraged parties to submit regular reports on their progress in implementing the Convention, for the purpose of reorienting the strategies adopted, readjusting the priorities and approaches and, as a result, improving the effectiveness of the measures applied.
3. Parties were invited to include in the reports which they submitted under the Convention's provisions appropriate information on their enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention, as a follow-up to the Declaration.
4. Pursuant to decision 8/COP.4, in the present document the secretariat has compiled, summarized and set out the information contained in the reports. The reports submitted by country parties also take into account contributions by non-governmental organizations involved in implementing the Convention at the national and regional levels. A uniform interpretation grid has been used with all the reports, in order to extract the salient elements submitted below.

II. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED TO THE CONVENTION SECRETARIAT

A. Summary of information submitted in the reports from African countries

5. As part of the preparations for the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention, held in November 2002, 47 national reports were summarized and a preliminary analysis prepared, based on information drawn from the previous reporting period, recommendations set out in the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group submitted to the Conference of the Parties at its fifth session (ICCD/COP.4/AHWG/6) and the guide for the preparation of the second series national reports. This work is structured around the seven thematic topics listed in paragraph 10 of decision 1/COP.5.
6. Where progress in implementation of the Convention is concerned, an analysis of the reports reveals disparities between the different countries, even if overall progress has been achieved at the regional level. Of the 47 African countries which submitted reports, 27 had completed the preparation of their national action programmes.
7. These programmes, which constitute the strategic framework for all desertification control activities, must form part of the macroeconomic planning process: in this way, they will also serve as tools for the development of poverty reduction strategies.

8. The steps taken by countries in the process of preparing and implementing their national action programmes are underpinned by participatory processes involving the mobilization of different sectors of society. Three quarters of the countries report that they have organized decentralized cooperation on the basis of equal participation by men and women. More than half the reports mention that groups of stakeholders who have hitherto had little involvement in the discussion of environmental and development issues have not only been given a chance to express their views, they have been able to bring their own specific viewpoints and concerns to the table. The wide range of views and opinions of the various stakeholders has helped enrich the process of dialogue and consultation. It has made it possible to define more clearly what should be included in the national action programmes and to build consensus on the next steps to be taken.

9. In most countries, there is increasing evidence of progress towards the decentralized management of natural resources, thereby facilitating the involvement of all the categories of stakeholders concerned with the design, implementation and follow-up of development policies and programmes. The new viewpoints brought by such stakeholders are leading, in turn, to the emergence or, as the case may be, strengthening of local desertification control machinery, which itself serves as a framework for the mobilization of stakeholders and as an interface between local populations and support agencies. The competence of this local machinery varies widely from one place to another. The decentralization process must, moreover, be strengthened if grass-roots communities are to be more fully involved in developing and implementing the national action programmes.

10. In accordance with their specific situations, many countries have taken appropriate institutional steps and set in place new legislative or administrative arrangements to create conditions conducive to implementation of the Convention, such as through the establishment or strengthening of national coordination bodies, the conduct of land reforms and the passing of new environmental laws based on the innovative principles which inform the Convention.

11. The major gains made in implementing the Convention should not be allowed to obscure certain constraints which should be tackled as promptly as possible, so as to ensure the maximum effect of initiatives undertaken at different levels. These constraints derive primarily from failure to integrate the various planning instruments for the integrated management of natural resources; the lack of available funding, through both national budgets and external support; problems in concluding sustainable partnership agreements; and obstacles to the transfer of technology.

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

12. The national action programmes cover a wide range of activities at the national level relating to the sustainable management of natural resources and poverty alleviation. Technical measures, such as the rehabilitation of degraded land, catchment management and others, are thus complemented by structural measures designed to render the institutional framework more efficient and to build capacity in such areas as forward analysis and the programming, management, implementation and follow-up of projects.

13. At the regional level, four thematic programme networks have been laid out as part of the regional action programme for the period 2000-2002. One of these networks deals with integrated water resource management in the major transboundary river, lake and hydrogeological basins, while the other is concerned with agroforestry and soil conservation.

2. Sustainable use and management of rangelands

14. Although this thematic area was identified as a priority for national action, it is primarily at the regional level that action has been taken to date, in particular with regard to the sustainable management of shared or transboundary plant and animal resources. Another regional initiative relates to the launching of a thematic network on the sound management of rangeland and the promotion of forage crops.

3. Development of sustainable agricultural and ranching production systems

15. In agriculture, the main innovations are to be found in the introduction of irrigation systems using low-cost technologies. It appears that, to meet small-scale irrigation needs, certain countries have chosen to import pumping systems while others have constructed hillside dams.

16. Certain countries plan to undertake an evaluation of projects to support the development of agricultural and livestock production, with a view to improving them by incorporating the innovatory approaches proposed by the Convention, such as the promotion of a stronger horizontal coherence, the forging of links between sectoral and cross-cutting policies and the development of a new type of partnership between the different stakeholders concerned.

4. Development of new and renewable energy sources

17. The reports draw attention to difficulties experienced by countries in discerning the interconnection between renewable energy and desertification, despite their efforts to ensure that their various energy, forestry, land and water policies are properly coordinated. The technology for the use of these renewable energy sources has been developed but its application has been impeded by several factors, including the excessive cost of certain back-up components; lack of the necessary background skills for the maintenance of these back-up components; and insufficient political and economic support for initiatives to promote new and renewable energy sources. Sustainable management of energy resources is a high priority area of subregional and regional cooperation.

5. Launching of reforestation and afforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation programmes

18. In several countries, thanks to the momentum generated by the national action programmes it has been possible to revise reforestation projects already under way, so as to bring them into line with the Convention's guidelines, with the involvement of stakeholders, the coordination of policies, and the development of partnerships at various levels. It has also given new impetus to other tree-planting and forest-management initiatives and to the regeneration of degraded natural formations.

19. In general terms, improvements at the institutional level have facilitated progress in natural resource management practices towards a more decentralized approach more in touch with local communities. This trend has been inspired by failures in the centralized administrative management of natural resources. Lessons drawn from these experiences demonstrate that the management of natural resources by local communities is an essential precondition for any progress towards sustainable development.

6. Development of early warning systems for food security and drought forecasting

20. One of the main achievements resulting from the development of early warning systems has been the launching of projects which range across different subregions of the continent. A case in point is that launched by the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) in partnership with the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), which involves the collection, analysis and compilation of biophysical data and the production of statistics and cartographic materials, with the aim of developing up-to-date forecasting and early warning models.

7. Desertification monitoring and assessment

21. Certain countries have included in their national action programmes priority projects designed to give a better understanding of the process of desertification and to monitor and assess the effects of desertification and drought. Other countries report that they have at their disposal not only efficient environmental information systems, but also the necessary capacity to collect the information needed for the monitoring and assessment of the process of desertification. Some mention the existence of databases and the use of geographical information systems as a means of generating relevant information. The arrangements set in place in certain areas are complemented by the national networks of long-term environmental monitoring observatories launched at the initiative of the Sahara and Sahel Observatory.

22. In most countries, given the inadequacy of the systems for measuring the impact of desertification control programmes, continued support is needed for the development of information systems and systems for the monitoring and assessment of development and desertification control projects.

8. Lessons to be learned

23. One of the main lessons to be drawn from an analysis of the materials submitted is that the lack of adequate and predictable funding may hamper the effective implementation of the national action programmes. Given this situation, some countries have made efforts to set up national desertification control funds to finance the priority activities identified in their programmes. These efforts are still far from giving conclusive results, however.

24. The national reports do not systematically identify synergies between the national action programmes and the other multilateral environmental agreements, notwithstanding their reaffirmations of the principle of the coordinated implementation of these conventions. In fact, the implementation strategies for the different conventions are still being developed and applied in isolation from one another.

25. The institutional options selected to steer the national action programmes, whereby the national coordination body reports to the ministry responsible for the environment, however effective they might look in theory, present the danger of being not always conducive to coordination among the different public and private institutions involved with desertification control. To avoid this pitfall, certain countries have opted for a more representative, umbrella body standing above the various ministerial departments. Generally speaking, these bodies are inter-ministerial in form, which makes it easier to coordinate and harmonize the national coordination body's activities.

26. As a rule, little progress has been made in integrating desertification control into the strategies and priorities drawn up by the different countries. This situation is partly due to the fact that the ministerial departments in charge of macroeconomic planning have only a marginal role in the process of developing and implementing the national action programmes.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

27. It should be stressed that, when setting funding priorities, more systematic consideration should be given to the harnessing of synergies in the implementation of the Rio conventions. This consideration takes due account of the competition among the many different demands on funding, which seriously hampers implementation of the various conventions.

28. Given the large number of African countries which are now at the stage of finalizing their national action programmes, it would seem more important than ever for these countries to give effect to their political will to strengthen the implementation of the Convention through meaningful budgetary arrangements. This would help convince their major development partners that desertification control is, without any doubt, a priority for Africa. At the same time, the implementation of partnership programmes with developed-country parties should not depend exclusively on such classical instruments as projects, but should rather be oriented towards innovatory arrangements designed to promote both desertification control and poverty eradication.

29. Another important aspect to stress is the need to forge links between the process of implementing the Convention, in particular the regional action programme and the environmental initiative of Africa's New Partnership for Development (NEPAD), which is designed to serve as a strategic framework for the partnership between Africa and its principal development partners.

30. There is a suggestion that indicators should be designed for measuring the level of participation of civil society, with particular focus on the involvement of women and young people. Following the same argument, the reports demonstrate the interest of innovative approaches, such as joint evaluations and the preparation of country profiles to supplement national reports.

B. Summary of information submitted in the reports from Asian countries

31. In all, 30 Asian countries prepared national reports in 2002 in preparation for the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention. The reports identify the progress achieved by these countries in preparing their national action programmes

and also mention that most countries have adopted policies in line with the aims and objectives of the Convention. Several desertification control programmes have been launched over the recent period, but, primarily because of the lack of funds, these efforts have had limited impact.

32. The reports stress the need for affected countries to adopt coordinated frameworks for action and to ensure that their desertification control initiatives are properly integrated in their national sustainable development strategies.

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

33. In several affected Asian countries, land restoration, drought alleviation and reforestation programmes have been conducted on a large scale. The viability of these programmes has been considerably boosted by the participation of the general population and the adoption of appropriate benefit-sharing methods. Such measures as dune stabilization, improved irrigation systems, run-off water recovery installations and waste water recycling have been extremely beneficial.

34. To prevent deforestation and the degradation of plant cover, a number of countries have launched coordinated forest-management plans in which local communities are given ownership rights over the forest products which substantially contribute to their own subsistence. Certain countries have established forest reserves, while others have adopted measures to control the practice of slash-and-burn cultivation, which is a contributory factor in the destruction of the plant cover.

35. Given the scarcity of water resources in certain arid or semi-arid areas, initiatives have been mounted to promote the collection of rainwater for agricultural uses, the use of small drinking water tanks, the restoration of existing ponds and the digging of new ones, and the replenishment of the groundwater table. The creation or strengthening of community water-user associations has helped in rationalizing the way in which water resources are used.

36. Several countries have implemented programmes to combat wind erosion, including such measures as the planting of wind breaks, reforestation along the periphery of deserts, regeneration of the plant cover on marginal land, and to arrest water erosion, through the restoration of catchment areas in hilly regions. Optimal irrigation methods are being tested for irrigation areas badly degraded by waterlogging and appropriate cropping patterns and drainage systems are being developed.

37. Most of the countries have revised their land-tenure laws with a view to introducing innovations designed:

- (a) To strengthen user rights;
- (b) To empower local bodies responsible for the management of natural resources;
- (c) To promote soil and water conservation;
- (d) To improve the management of water resources and fisheries;

(e) To conduct systematic impact evaluations of agricultural and forestry development programmes;

(f) To facilitate the rehabilitation of disaster-affected areas;

(g) To regulate the use of agrochemicals and pesticides;

(h) To promote integrated pest management;

(i) To improve access to safe drinking water and sanitation; and

(j) To regulate urban development, in particular, construction activities.

38. One country party passed a comprehensive law to combat desertification and has enacted land-use and zoning regulations. This country has also taken steps to improve intersectoral coordination.

2. Sustainable use and management of rangeland

39. To tackle the problem of the degradation of grazing land, certain countries have taken steps to limit the size of livestock herds and to increase the productivity of rangeland by regulating access to communal land.

40. At the subregional and regional levels, programmes and thematic networks have been launched to promote the sustainable management of rangeland and to improve the productivity of livestock farming.

3. Development of sustainable agricultural and ranching production systems

41. Given the extent of land degradation and the loss of land productivity, many countries have given high priority to environmentally appropriate population policies. Likewise, they have promoted improved water management, the use of organic fertilizers, appropriate agricultural methods and the proper management of catchment areas.

4. Development of new and renewable energy sources

42. Lack of progress in developing energy-efficient technologies, in particular wood-burning, and growing awareness of the challenges of sustainable development have led a large number of countries to adopt energy policies which promote the use of renewable and alternative energy options and greater energy efficiency. Thus, to reduce pressure on forest resources, parties are developing renewable energy sources.

5. Launching of reforestation and afforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation programmes

43. The countries of this region place particular stress on reforestation, joint forest management schemes and capacity-building among communities so that they are able to undertake the rehabilitation of degraded land. Steps have been taken to strengthen the involvement of local communities in the management of natural resources, by recognizing their

rights to forest products, providing economic incentives, and other measures. A combination of steps have been taken to promote reforestation: these include the mobilization of communities, encouraging individual initiatives and launching public programmes.

6. Development of early warning systems for food security and drought forecasting

44. The reports describe efforts to strengthen meteorological services and to develop early warning systems designed, among other things, to prevent such natural disasters as landslides.

45. The increasingly uneven distribution of rainfall and the resulting extreme weather events have persuaded countries of the need to combine early warning systems with preventive actions focused on controlling desertification and mitigating the effects of drought.

46. The reports show that most countries have set in place emergency response systems to deal with food shortages resulting from natural disasters. Some have set up buffer stocks of food grains.

7. Desertification monitoring and assessment

47. The reports indicate that some countries are not yet equipped with desertification monitoring and assessment systems, while others already have systems to measure progress in combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. In all cases, countries are relying on the resources which will be made available to them through their national action programmes to perfect their assessment systems.

48. Recent planning trials have enabled countries to make diagnostic studies of their natural resources and to determine the parameters for monitoring both the process of land degradation and the social and economic impact of activities being conducted. Countries have taken advantage of these experiences to improve their environmental information systems and to compile databases.

49. The reports mention that universities and research centres have also contributed to the creation of assessment and monitoring systems. These bodies have developed scientific tools and methodologies providing improved observation and more accurate assessment of drought and desertification.

8. Lessons to be learned

50. The reports submitted by Asian countries stress the crucial importance of land-use observation and assessment activities as these can be used to fine-tune management and mitigation strategies. Human, institutional and financial resource constraints continue to impede the implementation of an efficient system for the monitoring and assessment of desertification.

51. The lack of available funding poses one of the main obstacles to the effective implementation of the action programmes which have already been developed. Accordingly, at the regional meeting held in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, in July 2002, cooperation agencies were encouraged to make a greater effort to respond to the urgent funding needs for the

implementation of the Convention. The meeting stressed that the commitment of affected countries should be manifested through systematic and more consistent contributions from national budgets to the funding of desertification control programmes.

52. Efforts to mobilize funds should be complemented by initiatives to promote the marketing of agricultural products from arid areas both nationally and internationally, so as to boost the income and improve the living conditions of the local communities.

53. In most cases, consultation processes appear not to have led to any partnership agreements. In the absence of such agreements, progress towards the effective implementation of the Convention will remain slow.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

54. Capacity-building is a priority need for all countries in the region involved in implementing the Convention. Where public and private institutions are concerned, the issue of capacity-building should be analysed in terms of strengthening the individual and collective capacities of these bodies to enable them not only to guide the planning process in an effective manner at the local and national levels, but also to mobilize the necessary funds to implement the programmes which they have developed.

55. Countries need reliable data to establish a baseline for evaluating the impact of activities and measuring their progress. Effective observation necessitates both the regular updating of these data and the building of human, institutional and technical capacity for the monitoring and assessment of the desertification process.

56. Countries need more efficient intersectoral coordination arrangements and indicators to measure the involvement of the different categories of stakeholders concerned with the implementation of the Convention.

57. At another level, the activities of the thematic networks should be stepped up, so as to facilitate harmonization of the benchmarks and indicators for the monitoring and assessment of desertification.

C. Summary of information submitted in the reports from Latin American and Caribbean countries

58. The 28 reports submitted by the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region for the period 2000-2001 stress the difficulties encountered by the countries, including those of a political and economic nature. In many cases this accounts for the low priority assigned to environmental protection measures, although the region's ecosystems are very vulnerable, especially in the islands whose size brings with it geographical, human, natural and financial constraints. It should be emphasized that some strategic areas for action identified in decision 8/COP.4 were not addressed in the reports from the countries of this region, as they do not enjoy priority.

59. Efforts have been made in several countries to guarantee the direct participation of local populations in the process of formulating and implementing environmental and development policies. In this context, initiatives are being taken by some countries to decentralize the

implementation of the Convention. Mention should be given to the example of the Aymara Parliament, where indigenous peoples, in particular the descendants of the Qullana now dispersed in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru, are discussing certain important issues such as how to combat desertification.

60. Close to half the countries report that they have made significant progress on legislative and institutional frameworks, which has involved the formulation of legislation on desertification control, forest and water resources management, the introduction of taxes and the development of forest management models.

61. The St. George's Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the region covered by the Organization of East Caribbean States (OECS) has had an important political and institutional impact in the east Caribbean countries. It laid the ground for harmonization and strengthening of environmental activities through a better grasp of the issues involved in land degradation and coastal erosion. In the same way, the Tegucigalpa Protocol of the Central American Commission for Development and Environment (CCAD), which was signed by the Central American countries, made it possible to promote a common approach to tackling environmental issues, including desertification.

62. Despite the progress made in the implementation of the Convention, various types of constraint remain. Solutions to these problems will include intensification of the participatory process.

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

63. Study of the various national reports and reference documents from countries which have finalized their national action programmes shows that integrated water basin management is a common cross-cutting issue which must be taken into account in order to promote the sustainable use and protection of natural resources. In the same way, the regional action programme could provide an appropriate framework for integrated transboundary basin management and thus make it possible to create linkages with sustainable development strategies and poverty eradication policies. This option should be reinforced by means of sustainable and environmentally sound agricultural practices based on both local knowledge and new technologies.

2. Development of sustainable agricultural and ranching production systems

64. Traditional zero-tillage and biomass growth technology are mentioned by a few countries as alternatives to a type of agriculture based on the quest for profit. These technologies enable farmers and local communities to secure higher productivity while safeguarding the natural resources cycle. Almost a third of countries comment in detail on the rehabilitation of degraded lands in their national reports. Some important initiatives have been developed for soil desalinization and promotion of reforestation. Several demonstration projects have been carried out in the areas of soil management and measures to certify production activities.

3. Launching of afforestation and reforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation programmes

65. The development of reforestation activities is mentioned in a few reports. Other countries highlight the existence of forestation programmes and the launching of demonstration projects for the restoration of soil productivity.

4. Development of early warning systems for food security and drought forecasting

66. Early warning systems are mentioned in almost three quarters of the reports. In view of the importance of drought-related problems in many countries, these countries are making efforts to develop instruments to enable them to monitor the evolution of desertification and prevent disasters.

67. The machinery established in some countries also seeks to draw on traditional knowledge. In this regard, research institutes have embarked on research into benchmarks and indicators for monitoring which are founded on local knowledge. These institutes strive to collect specific knowledge and technologies which the indigenous people have devised over the centuries and applied in their own ecological and cultural context.

5. Monitoring and assessment of desertification

68. Indicators to assess and monitor desertification are considered important for understanding the extent of this process at various levels. Some countries have made efforts to prepare a general diagnosis in order to better understand the scale of the problems to be tackled, measure the extent of the land degradation and show how this process affects both land productivity and the living conditions of the population. The absence of tested methodologies whereby indicators can be defined is a major constraint, according to the reports.

69. In several countries in the region, efforts are being made to develop research programmes covering trends and impacts of climate changes. In central America and the Caribbean, more special emphasis is placed on the impact of drought on national and local economies.

6. Lessons to be learned

70. According to several reports, meagre financial resources constitute the crucial constraint on implementation of the Convention. Despite the availability of certain financial resources, financial assistance is still inadequate and unpredictable at all levels of implementation of the Convention. This situation is aggravated by the fact that national coordinating bodies lack working tools and therefore cannot play their role effectively.

71. One of the issues to which the countries attach priority is incorporation of the objectives of the Convention into sectoral and cross-sectoral policies. In this regard, some Caribbean countries have drawn up a common framework for handling issues relating to drought, coastal erosion and land degradation. They are also making efforts to incorporate Convention guidelines into their legal and institutional frameworks so as to create an environment conducive to synergy among the various initiatives.

72. From an economic point of view, some reports refer to a novel aspect relating to the economic value that may be attributed to the positive impact of natural resources. The terrestrial bioproductive system and other natural resources perform an environmental service that should be taken into account by means of the creation of a payment mechanism. The resources generated by such a system will contribute to better conservation of natural resources and the environment.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

73. The reports underline that the focal points do not play a very dynamic role in the implementation of the Convention, and that their technical and institutional capabilities need improvement. These focal points must be enabled to prepare projects and undertake negotiations with national and international institutions. Moreover, the focal points should receive support for promoting interactions between existing national databases and other subregional, regional and international information systems, with the aim of consolidating scientific information on desertification control, mitigation of the effects of drought and management of degraded land.

74. The countries agree that an integrated approach to the problems of poverty and land degradation is indispensable for sustainable development. In that regard, the priority actions to be undertaken must relate to empowerment of local communities for the purpose of poverty eradication, better protection of natural resources, human resources capacity-building and equality between men and women.

75. The reports conclude that there is a need to create conditions which will permit fair trade and fair competition among the various countries. They also suggest that the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean should be helped to secure the technical and financial resources they need to devise and use tools for the implementation of the Convention at the various levels of action.

D. Summary of information submitted in the reports from northern Mediterranean countries

76. In 2002, eight countries in the region submitted reports to the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention. The reports record substantial efforts and progress in awareness-raising. They highlight dynamic involvement by local stakeholders and representatives of civil society in the activities of the national coordinating bodies.

77. Elsewhere, the reports note the existence of functional coordination machinery bringing together national authorities, the scientific community and civil-society stakeholders in efforts to combat desertification. From the standpoint of content, this consultative process emphasizes the mode of decision-making and the evaluation of progress made in the implementation of the Convention. It should be underlined that some strategic areas for action identified in decision 8/COP.4 are not priorities for the countries of the northern Mediterranean.

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

78. The reports highlight efforts by countries in the region in the areas of rehabilitation of degraded land through reforestation operations, rehabilitation of irrigation systems and land management. Yet a large gap remains between the scale of current challenges and the objective limits of the ongoing programmes.

2. Development of early warning systems for food security and drought forecasting

79. Three countries report major progress in the establishment of early warning systems for soil erosion and drought.

3. Desertification monitoring and assessment

80. Some reports provide information on measures to monitor and assess drought and desertification. These measures relate principally to the production of meteorological data which make it possible to monitor climate changes and variability and the establishment of soil erosion monitoring stations. Several countries already have their own desertification and drought monitoring databases, and are also participating in the setting up of a regional database.

81. Several countries mention the need to develop geographical information systems and remote sensing, and to strengthen capabilities in these areas. They also emphasize support to be given to initiatives in the field of mapping of sensitive areas at different scales. It should be noted that such efforts benefit from cooperation at the regional level. Specialized bodies have been entrusted with the task of defining indicators and carrying out desertification monitoring and assessment activities.

4. Lessons to be learned

82. At the legislative level, some countries report the ongoing adaptation of national laws and directives to the requirements arising from the formulation and implementation of national action programmes. Regarding synergies with other environmental conventions, a few countries reported progress, but it needs to be strengthened further.

83. It is clear that the main obstacle to the implementation of the Convention is the difficulty of mobilizing adequate funding, especially among the countries in the region which are not members of the European Union.

84. Networking among scientific institutions operating at the national and regional levels, and the exchange of data, have made it possible to focus more precisely on desertification processes and hence to target actions more accurately.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

85. To ensure a genuinely participatory process of Convention implementation, several countries recommend the adoption of local programming and the strengthening of decentralization processes. Such options are likely to make it easier to take local needs into account in the process of drafting and implementing national action programmes.

86. Incorporation of issues relating to land degradation into the programmes of schools and universities was suggested, in order to enable young people to better understand desertification issues.

E. Summary of information submitted in the reports from central and eastern European countries

87. In 2002, nine countries in the region submitted reports to the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention. It should be mentioned that many countries in central and eastern Europe have undergone profound economic, social and political changes, with the transition from centralized economies to the market economy. In some cases, these transformations (privatization, land reforms, decentralization, etc.) took place in a context that was difficult, to say the least. The transition period was marked by serious economic problems (a decline in productivity, worsening unemployment, larger budget deficits and higher inflation), although signs of economic stabilization and recovery have recently been noted.

88. In the face of these economic difficulties, many countries have been forced to earmark their limited budgetary resources for meeting certain fundamental needs, such as food and health. Currently, there is renewed interest in issues related to environmental protection and natural resource management, reflected in the launching of pilot projects and the establishment of incentives designed to encourage the protection and rehabilitation of land (taxes, charges, ecological insurance scheme, special funds, and so on). Analysis of the reports submitted by the countries of the region shows that the strategic areas for action identified in decision 8/COP.4 are not all priorities in central and eastern Europe.

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

89. The countries of the region are interested first and foremost in prevention of land degradation and the rehabilitation of degraded arable land and pastures. One country in the region has adopted a programme designed to improve land fertility, and has created a database on soil quality.

2. Launching of reforestation and afforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation programmes

90. Only one country reports a reforestation project covering 7,000 hectares of eroded soils and moving sands.

3. Development of early warning systems for food security and drought forecasting

91. A few countries supplied very brief information on this issue, others none. The importance of drought forecasting as a part of programmes for the integrated use of water resources was underlined in one of the reports.

4. Desertification monitoring and assessment

92. The details on this issue contained in the reports are very brief. Only one country lists various indicators used in monitoring processes of degradation related to wind and water erosion, landslides, land salinization and pollution. One of the reports indicates that the development of new environmental monitoring methods is a priority part of desertification control.

5. Lessons to be learned

93. Decentralized institutions can be strengthened to ensure a real participatory process and the translation of national action to the local level. That would also facilitate the incorporation of local needs into the national action programme process.

94. The economic difficulties experienced by almost all the countries in the region mean that only a very small part of national budgets is earmarked for environmental protection, and in particular for efforts to combat land degradation. At the same time, external financial assistance falls well below expectations. In view of this inadequacy of financial resources, countries are focusing more on developing transboundary cooperation and establishing incentives to encourage the sustainable development of natural resources.

95. Another important factor for progress identified by these countries relates to the establishment of interlinkages between the national action programmes, the associated sectoral programmes (agriculture, forestry, water resources, energy and so on) and long-term macroeconomic policies.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

96. The priorities identified by the countries of the region for the implementation of the Convention are basically linked to efforts to combat land degradation and protect cultivable land from soil erosion. At a regional meeting held in 2002, the countries emphasized the need to structure the national action programmes around such major concerns as the sustainable management of soils and water, water basin management, efforts to combat soil erosion and salinization and the reduction of pollution of underground water.

97. The concerted implementation of the Rio conventions is viewed by the countries of the region as an imperative. In order to promote such synergy, the action programmes drawn up under the three conventions should identify lines of convergence and establish a joint reference base which makes use of the same indicators. These programmes should also promote the pooling of resources within transboundary projects and the application of joint programmes for evaluation and monitoring of the process of desertification.

98. It is also essential to readjust the arrangements for monitoring drought and land degradation, so as to mould them round objectives involving not only crisis management, but also risk prevention.

F. Summary of information submitted in the reports of organizations forming part of the United Nations system and those of the other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

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

99. In Africa and Asia, programmes relating to rehabilitation of degraded land, dune stabilization and integrated water resources management are currently being implemented with the help of certain agencies, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In Africa, a special land and water initiative has been launched jointly by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNDP and the World Bank. This initiative addresses all the environmental problems associated with land degradation and the management of transboundary waters, in order to promote sustainable development and food security.

100. In the Middle East, central Asia and the Mediterranean basin, certain United Nations specialized agencies are supporting the resettlement of marginalized communities living on the edge of the desert. In the countries of north Africa, the national agricultural research centres, in cooperation with supporting organizations, are developing programmes for grass-roots community exploitation of residual water resources in order to develop irrigation.

101. In the various regions of the world, the United Nations specialized agencies focus their efforts on a number of key sectors such as restoration of soil fertility, protection of forests and natural habitats and management of shared water resources. They also incorporate into their activities such core issues as land tenure, strengthening of the involvement of non-governmental organizations and women in activities, access to credit, decentralized cooperation for rural development, and development of practices and strategies based on local knowledge.

2. Development of sustainable agricultural and ranching production systems

102. In most semi-arid and arid zones, organizations such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank concentrate on investment projects, the revival of organic agriculture and the promotion of best practices in the field of sustainable land management.

103. As population movements associated with the wars and conflicts affecting various regions of the world intensify, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is seeking to reduce the impact of the presence of refugees and their activities on fragile ecosystems. In this context, it is promoting improved agricultural practices, reforestation and forest management activities, efficient water resource management techniques and improved livestock-raising systems. These activities are managed through a programme of environmental awareness-raising and education.

3. Development of new and renewable energy sources

104. In Africa, the project on biodiversity conservation and renewable energy technologies initiated by UNEP is worthy of mention. This project aims at empowering communities living in the countries of the lake Chad basin to participate actively in renewable natural resource management and rural development activities.

4. Launching of reforestation and afforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation programmes

105. In Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, intergovernmental organizations and the agencies in the United Nations system place particular emphasis on reforestation, efforts to combat wind erosion, dune fixation and the development of databases on arid-zone plants, with a view to facilitating the selection of species which are suited to such ecosystems.

5. Development of early warning systems for food security and drought forecasting

106. In Asia and Africa, agencies such as FAO and IFAD support the implementation of food security programmes as well as the organization of self-help groups drawing on traditional technologies to create links with markets and strengthen food security in various communities.

107. In several regions of the world, various specialized agencies are supporting development activities designed to strengthen food security and means of subsistence for poor population groups living on land subject to drought and desertification. They support activities for soil and water conservation, and construction of small-scale irrigation schemes. In this context, the World Food Programme (WFP) provides food for work to people who participate in agricultural production, environmental protection and training. It also provides technical assistance to upgrade the expertise of public institutions in vulnerability analysis and food security programme development.

6. Desertification monitoring and assessment

108. In Africa, a joint European Commission/FAO regional project currently under way is designed to improve data collection and the information base on forests, principally in the fields of energy.

109. Action by the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) in various subregions of the African continent is aimed at strengthening national capacities for monitoring desertification. In this context, a long-term ecological monitoring observatories network has been set up. OSS is also promoting an information system on desertification and environmental information and monitoring system on the Internet (SID/SISEI).

110. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a regional study on the establishment of economic and social indicators for desertification has been carried out by FAO, in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Agencies such as UNEP are also supporting the development of specific indicators for monitoring the region's semi-arid and arid ecosystems.

111. Initiatives have been launched in various regions of the world to improve hydrological and meteorological monitoring networks and systems, develop exchanges of data on land degradation, and encourage the transfer of knowledge and technology by intensifying research on the interactions between climate, the hydrological regime and desertification. These activities benefit from support from several agencies, including the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNEP.

III. PRINCIPAL LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE VARIOUS REPORTS

112. One of the first lessons to be drawn from the reports which were submitted relates to the fact that the participatory process has been difficult to apply in the context of the implementation of the national action programmes. Moreover, these programmes have not led to the mobilization of the expected financial resources, as a result of a variety of constraints, including:

(a) The overall decline in official development assistance over the past decade has been aggravated by a drop in the resources granted to agriculture and natural resources management by the cooperation agencies;

(b) The objectives of the Convention are only poorly incorporated into national strategies, including poverty alleviation strategies, so that the commitment of Governments of countries affected by desertification to support the implementation of their national action programmes is not backed up by adequate budgetary provision;

(c) The low priority attached to desertification control in cooperation programmes negotiated with the development partners.

113. In order to consolidate the impetus of efforts to combat desertification, it is important to strengthen the involvement of the main stakeholders, including rural population groups, in the initiatives which are taken, and to foster greater consistency between the prospects for the implementation of the Convention and the decentralization policies which bring about major structural changes. In addition, there is a need to adopt a system of incentives regarding access to and use of natural resources, so as to create conditions conducive to sustainable and fair land use.

114. Non-governmental organizations deplored the fact that participatory initiatives remain authoritarian and standardized and fail to allow the creation of genuine momentum in negotiation on the issues and directions involved in the Convention implementation process. The commitment of the authorities and development partners to promoting participation by non-governmental organizations and other elements of civil society in the Convention implementation process should be reflected in a determination to make the quality of this involvement a decisive criterion in evaluating the initiatives launched.

115. It will be for the various sectors of civil society to draw lessons from their involvement in the Convention process, in order to identify the levers which can contribute to strengthening their ability to respond to the challenges posed by the Convention and play a growing role in the development and implementation of policies and programmes to combat desertification. To that end, all the categories of stakeholder in civil society should manage to construct their own

approach incorporating the priority lines of action on the basis of the critical review of the policies followed and their aspirations. They must also define and apply appropriate mechanisms for representation which take account of the criteria of quality and legitimacy.

116. The strategies launched as part of efforts to combat poverty have in some cases caused an exacerbation of conflicts relating to access to land and other factors of production. They have also revealed the gap between the guidelines in agricultural development policies focused on promotion of cash crops and the expectations of rural producers whose prime concern is to ensure food security. The time has come for the Convention to take up these issues, if it wishes to contribute to attainment of one of the Millennium Development Goals - to promote efforts to combat poverty and hunger.

117. The Convention constitutes a basis for promoting the mobilization of the various categories of stakeholder around common interests and shared concerns. Fair and transparent application of the laws of the market will modify the behaviour of businesses and all private-sector operators by encouraging them to attach greater value to traditional technologies and become more involved in conservation of ecosystems, while safeguarding their economic interests.

118. The options in favour of long-term strategic planning deserve to be encouraged, since they contribute to the creation of a public-private partnership. The systems of incentives which mobilize the private sector in support of desertification control efforts should be popularized more widely in the context of implementation of the national action programmes, in particular to promote joint public-private initiatives. Strengthening this participation by the private sector will require spelling out the economic and commercial opportunities inherent in a commercial system which takes greater account of the products of the dry zones.

IV. GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

119. The Parties should enhance the position and the visibility of the Convention in their planning systems, and also, where necessary, encourage a convergence of guidelines regarding food security, poverty eradication and desertification control, where population growth is going to lead to still greater pressure on land, above all in vulnerable areas.

120. In order to enhance the effectiveness of desertification control activities, the Parties should not only adopt action programmes founded on long-term priorities, but also incorporate these priorities in the planning frameworks which serve as a basis for economic and social development policy. Likewise, there is a need to promote linkages between the Convention and other instruments such as poverty reduction strategy papers, Agenda 21, the plan for the implementation of the conclusions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development or NEPAD, which offer an opportunity to incorporate concerns relating to environmental sustainability into programmes for economic development and poverty alleviation.

121. Special emphasis must be placed on the need to establish linkages between the process of monitoring the plan for the implementation of the conclusions of the Johannesburg Summit and the process relating to the implementation of the Declaration on the commitments to enhance the

implementation of the obligations of the Convention. This linkage is all the more necessary as certain thematic areas in the Declaration were also identified as priority areas in the context of the plan of action formulated in Johannesburg.

122. The strategic areas for action in the Declaration constitute an important lever for the promotion of sustainable development. The development partners are increasingly seeking the best ways and means of supporting sustainable development efforts pursued by the poor countries. Hence the sixth Conference of the Parties could call on the development partners to strive to take the objectives and goals of the Convention and the national action programmes into account in their strategies for assistance to the affected country Parties.

123. The institution of a productive and diversified partnership aiming in particular to support the efforts of the least developed countries is essential for vigorous launching of the implementation of the national action programmes. It should be noted that many of these programmes were drawn up with limited financial support from the development partners, whose efforts focused mainly on organizing workshops and preparing planning documents. The national action programmes embody significant achievements, but they must be backed up by such steps as, first, the definition of a reference situation (initial profile) so that progress can be measured and detailed analytical evaluations carried out; second, a “plan of campaign” for mobilization of financial resources from the various interested partners; and, third, a reliable and effective mechanism for monitoring and evaluation.

124. The establishment of a focal area within the Global Environment Facility (GEF) embracing efforts to combat land degradation, especially desertification and deforestation, constitutes a powerful means of encouraging countries to promote, within the context of the national action programmes, integrated planning of land use which coherently links the meeting of local needs and the imperative of ecosystem conservation. Similarly, the international agencies should enhance the support they provide for the implementation of the Convention.

125. The development of synergy between the three conventions constitutes the starting point for an innovative approach which takes into account the fact that desertification, climate changes and biological diversity are interdependent phenomena which jointly affect man’s environment. This initiative makes it possible to address these environmental problems in an interactive manner by combining several elements (land degradation, restoration of agro-ecological equilibria, conservation of biological diversity, reduction of the vulnerability of sectors of activity to climate changes) and taking into account their social, economic and political dimensions. Strengthening synergies implies improved cooperation between the institutional structures operating at the various levels.

126. Rather than opting for methods of obtaining synergy which are promoted from the central level with the idea of subsequent appropriation of the process by the grass-roots communities, it seems wiser to opt from the outset for a system of local programming which makes it possible to guarantee the involvement of population groups and ensure that the actions decided on are sustainable. In this context, the grass-roots communities will be encouraged to foster several processes through a single operation (forest management, soil and water conservation, protection of biological diversity, sequestration of carbon, improvement of pastureland, and so on).

127. In the affected countries listed in an annex, Governments must display their political commitment in support of the Convention not only by including funds for desertification control efforts in the national budget, but also by adopting incentives aimed at promoting greater involvement by the private sector in desertification control at the local and national level. The system of incentives must also serve as a lever to strengthen the chain of production-processing-marketing of products derived from natural resources, in particular through better access to national and international markets.

128. In the context of the formulation of the action programmes, the Parties have made major efforts to establish monitoring and evaluation systems based on machinery for the collection and processing of environmental information. Bolstering these achievements calls for a number of readjustments intended to transform the machinery for monitoring and impact evaluation into a coherent whole combining indicators which are both biophysical and socio-economic.

129. In order to create the conditions for stricter monitoring of the implementation of the Declaration on the commitments to enhance the implementation of the obligations of the Convention, the framework for the preparation of national reports on the implementation of the Convention should incorporate the thematic areas specified in decision 8/COP.4.
