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Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on improving the procedures
for communication of information

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for communication of information

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

1. This document contains the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) established by decision 8/COP.7. The report was adopted ad referendum and does not constitute a negotiated text.
2. The Group is composed of five representatives from each regional and interest group. The Chairs of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the Committee on Science and Technology, as well as a representative from the Global Mechanism (GM), are advisers to the Group.
3. The Group convened a first meeting in Buenos Aires on 17 and 20 March 2007 and agreed its organization and programme of work. The Group continued its work by electronic means after CRIC 5, and convened a second meeting in Rome on 5 and 6 June 2007, to review and finalize its preliminary report.

* The submission of this document was delayed in order to receive the required feedback from the members of the Group.

4. This document is based on the problem analysis contained in documents ICCD/CRIC(3)/8 and ICCD/CRIC(5)/9, as well as on consultations among the members of the Group. The conclusions and recommendations contained herein are still to be considered as preliminary, in view of the interlinkages and the possible impact of parallel processes such as the review of the CRIC and the consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its eighth session of a ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (2008–2018).

5. Document ICCD/CRIC(6)/6/Add.1 contains the input of the GM to the AHWG.

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I. Introduction

1. This report contains a set of conclusions and recommendations from the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on ways and means of improving procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties (COP). These conclusions and recommendations are based on the problem analysis contained in previous documents on the matter (ICCD/CRIC(3)/8 and ICCD/CRIC(5)/9), as well as on deliberations undertaken at the meetings of the AHWG (17 and 20 March 2007 in Buenos Aires and 5–6 June 2007 in Rome).

2. It is understood that due to the limited time available and the complexity of the matters before the Group, it was not possible to devise adequately, as requested by decision 8/COP.7, simplified, consistent reporting procedures and formats for reports. Other inputs were deemed essential in order to complete the work of the AHWG, namely the outcomes of the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG) and the views of Parties and observers on the review of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), and the deliberations at COP 8 on such matters.

3. This document does not constitute a negotiated agreed text and was adopted ad referendum. The recommendations contained in its chapter V, as well as those contained in chapters II, III and IV, may furnish draft decisions to be deliberated upon at CRIC 6 and subsequently adopted at COP 8, in accordance with decision 8/COP.7.

4. According to the mandate received by decision 8/COP.7, the secretariat has facilitated the work of the AHWG since its establishment. A dedicated web page on the Convention website has been created, as well as an e-mailing list and a dedicated e-mail address, in order to facilitate communication among the Group's members and advisers. A compilation of members' submissions on "technical issues experienced in the national reporting process, and suggestions for improvement" was issued for consideration by the CRIC at its fifth session (ICCD/CRIC(5)/9). The preliminary deliberations at CRIC 5 on this matter were compiled and submitted to the first meeting of the AHWG. As provided in decision 8/COP.7, a meeting of the AHWG was convened between CRIC 5 and COP 8, thanks to voluntary contributions raised by the secretariat. In order to facilitate exchange of information, the Chair of the IIWG was invited to participate in the meetings of the AHWG and to report on the status of the deliberations of the IIWG.

A. Background information

1. Brief summary regarding the current situation of the implementation of the Convention

5. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) entered into force on 26 December 1996 and currently has 191 country Parties. Activities undertaken during the decade 1996–2006 have further confirmed the analysis and the reasons that justified the need to define objectives and principles for tackling human-induced land degradation in the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas of the world.

6. The UNCCD recognizes the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of desertification, and the importance of redirecting technology transfer so that it is demand-driven,

and of the involvement of local communities in combating desertification and land degradation. The core of the UNCCD is the development of national, subregional and regional action programmes (NAPs, SRAPs, and RAPs) by national governments, in cooperation with donors, local communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). To date, 96 NAPs have been formulated by affected country Parties. In addition, 13 SRAPs and 5 RAPs have been established under the UNCCD.

7. Some real advances have been made with regard to the legal international architecture, by effectively succeeding in bringing forward and confirming the issue of desertification as a fully fledged item in the global sustainable development agenda. However, taking into consideration the changing global environmental situation, new objective realities such as deep links between desertification and climate change would require an enhanced focus or innovative approach to implementing the UNCCD.

8. At the level of implementing action programmes emerging from the provisions of the Convention, bottlenecks have been identified irrespective of geographic location. NAPs, as the core tool for UNCCD implementation at national level, are still lacking adequate support both in terms of financial resources committed by national governments and developed country Parties, and in terms of international support generated so far. In addition, the debate on mainstreaming NAPs into broader development strategies has so far not provided a sufficient answer as to how implementation of the UNCCD could be adequately monitored and reported upon through the CRIC without losing sight of the specific objectives identified by the Convention and agreed by country Parties. The same difficulty is experienced at subregional and regional level with regard to the establishment and implementation of SRAPs and RAPs.

9. The review of the implementation of the Convention conducted through the various sessions of the CRIC has highlighted a few major lessons learned, particularly with regard to thematic topics reviewed, using national reports. Progress has been made in subtopics identified as important or even crucial for successful implementation of the Convention. Also, participatory approaches have become more and more embedded in national planning structures aimed at improving the livelihoods of local communities. Advances in institution building have also been recorded, but in affected country Parties capacities remain low for tackling the complex difficulties entailed in streamlining cross-cutting development processes. More prominence in the recent past has been given to sound scientific research into land degradation and desertification, its causes and ramifications. Likewise the issue of benchmarks and indicators has gained in importance, taking into consideration that the majority of affected country Parties have completed the institutional phase of UNCCD implementation by finalizing their NAPs, and have entered into the project implementation phase.

10. After 10 years of UNCCD implementation, results and outcomes identified by the CRIC are mixed. It was unanimously agreed that reporting plays a major role in assessing implementation and hence it was requested that reporting be streamlined and more UNCCD focused, following discussions in the CRIC and the deliberations of the AHWG.

11. Several issues have been raised by Parties in relation to the varying degrees of coverage and detail of financial information included in reports to the UNCCD. This includes, for instance, issues of double-counting in the case of projects addressing more than a single policy objective. Major discrepancies have also been found between the reports of developed and

developing countries in relation to activities financed by a blend of domestic resources and official development assistance (ODA) (a full account of these issues is provided in document ICCD/CRIC(5)/9).

12. Progress has been recorded in information exchange on best practices worldwide, while quantitative impact assessment of measures and programmes to combat desertification is lacking or very limited, in the absence of specific measurable targets for Convention implementation.

2. Information on reporting under other relevant conventions, agencies and bodies¹

13. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) inventory review guidelines ensure that the reviews are conducted consistently in a technically sound manner. Annual review ensures that adequate consideration is given to recalculations and emission trends over time. The participation of experts nominated by Parties helps to ensure that the review results are objective, credible and recognized by Parties. In addition, it helps build inventory capacity across all Parties. Lead reviewers have a special role in guiding the review teams to ensure the quality, the consistency and the objectivity of the reviews.

14. National reporting under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an important opportunity to assess progress made towards the 2010 targets defined in the Strategic Plan for Implementation. Current guidelines were prepared according to guidance provided by the first meeting of the Working Group on Review of Implementation. Supporting tools are developed to assist Parties in preparing their national reports, including a guide, an online support facility and a sample report. Biodiversity indicators are used as tools for monitoring the status of trends of biodiversity at various levels.

15. Reports under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands follow a structured questionnaire approach, using the reporting and planning framework provided by the Bureau and a set of indicators developed by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP).

16. According to the multi-year programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the thematic clusters are addressed in each cycle in an integrated manner, taking into account economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The CSD encourages countries to provide national reports on a voluntary basis, in particular to the Commission's review sessions. Guidelines for reporting under the topic under review are circulated in the form of a short questionnaire.

3. Links with the Millennium Development Goals

17. The UNCCD has been recognized as an important tool for delivering some of the objectives and goals identified by the World Summit on Environment and Sustainable Development (WSSD). The debate on how to streamline approaches to combat desertification into broader development strategies at national level that are trying to deliver the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has since then taken centre stage during official sessions of the

¹ More detailed information on reporting under other relevant conventions and bodies is contained in annex II to this document. Information on "Rio Markers", developed by the secretariat of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is contained in document ICCD/CRIC/(6)/Add.1.

CRIC without, however, addressing how activities undertaken within the context of the MDGs could be captured by national reports and assessed by pertinent COP decisions. Nevertheless, many reports have addressed the matter of prevention and control of desertification in a cost-effective way, by suggesting clear sustainable land management (SLM) strategies.

4. Links with the work undertaken by the Committee on Science and Technology

18. Scientific information on the causes and consequences of land degradation and desertification has been seen in recent years as being more and more important in order to strengthen the scientific knowledge relating to these phenomena and to improve the scientific backing of the deliberations of Parties. Linkages among global environmental and social threats still need to be addressed in depth, particularly relations between soil, water and the atmosphere. However, current working methods as well as the mandate of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) have raised concern about how effectively to use information generated by the CST for a review of implementation at national, subregional and regional levels.

B. Purpose

19. The overall purpose of the AHWG is to advise on how to improve the communication of information by Parties and observers, with a view to facilitating both the review of implementation through the CRIC and decision-making.

20. Special attention is to be given to parallel processes such as the IIWG and the review of the CRIC, both to be deliberated upon during COP 8. This report thus highlights the links between these two items on the agenda of COP 8 in order to facilitate decision-making on a set of rather complex topics.

1. Rationale

21. The rationale of the AHWG process is outlined in decision 8/COP.7. According to that decision and in line with its terms of reference, the underlying rationale is to facilitate:

(a) The provision of guidance to the COP on simplified, consistent reporting procedures and formats for reports;

(b) The clarification and standardization of terms and issues targeted in current reporting with a view to their eventual application in the new formats of reports;

(c) A more substantive assessment of the implementation of the Convention at national level through the review of reports by Parties and observers.

2. Links with the strategic plan of work of the IIWG

22. Because implementation is tightly linked to potential targets and objectives outlined in the “ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance implementation of the UNCCD (2008–2018)”, it is essential that output of the IIWG’s work is fed back into the work of the AHWG. However, it is also necessary that practicalities of targets and objectives in reporting are taken into consideration in the implementation and monitoring of the strategic plan.

23. The AHWG recognizes the need to identify objectives and indicators in order to enable Parties to report on measurable impacts at the national level. Parties would be responsible for developing targets for achieving national-level objectives.

C. Role of country profiles in national reporting and possible improvements in their use

24. The usefulness of the concept of a country profile was recognized by the AHWG; however, the current format was considered not comprehensive enough for an assessment at national and global levels or for a comparison over time. Extensive discussions were held in order to ascertain what role country profiles should play in reporting and how extensive and sophisticated in terms of technical input they should be.

25. The country profile would facilitate a comparison of progress made by country Parties at international level. While the narrative part of the national report will be useful to the CRIC in order to identify best practices and lessons learned, the country profile will need to ensure that comparability of biophysical and socio-economic data is made possible over time.

26. Compliance to a technical standard prescribed by a new format raised concern with regard to the extent to which the levels of human capacities and knowledge in affected country Parties enable them to deliver high-quality products effectively.

27. Indicators to be used in a revised format for country profiles were also extensively discussed, highlighting a difficulty in matching the need to have as qualitative data as possible on progress made with the existing national infrastructure for monitoring, collecting, and processing relevant data.

28. Taking into consideration the need to ensure continuous monitoring at national level, which would enhance the quality of the reports and capacities of human resources involved in reporting, national-level information networking systems are required through which enhanced data collection would be possible.

29. The country profile would serve as an analytic tool within the national reporting process. It should allow:

(a) Identification of the dimensions and peculiarities of drought, land degradation and desertification processes at the national or decentralized level according to national data;

(b) Self-assessment for decision-making at local/national level; and

(c) Assessment of the progress of the implementation of the Convention at national, and particularly at the international, level.

30. Reporting under country profiles should:

(a) Be country driven;

- (b) Rely on currently existing national indicator systems;
- (c) Focus on a selection of biophysical, socio-economic and financial indicators relevant for drought, land degradation and desertification;
- (d) Be territorially explicit;
- (e) Be time referenced.

31. Affected country Parties should first review their own national systems, select appropriate indicators and establish country profiles making use of the available information. In a second phase the country profile should include:

- (a) New indicators, of national, regional or global dimension, that must be integrated and institutionalized at national level;
- (b) Assessment of drought, land degradation and desertification monitoring, and resultant output endorsed by national governments;
- (c) Forecasting of drought, land degradation and desertification by national governments and/or independent organizations.

32. Striking the right balance between a sophisticated but unattainable format and the watering down of information to the point of not being able to use or process it at the international level is recognized as difficult. Country Parties that are not hence in a position to comply with a newly devised format should be given the opportunity to provide information in different ways. It is hoped that these shortcomings will be lessened as time goes on and with the assistance regarding national monitoring tools provided by the international community.

D. Role of benchmarks and indicators in reporting

33. The use of impact indicators was recognized as instrumental in achieving improvements in reviewing progress made in implementation of the Convention. Two sets of impact indicators are needed – a set of local indicators used for monitoring progress made at national level and a limited set of internationally agreed benchmarks and indicators which would facilitate a review at the global level.

34. The consistent utilization of benchmarks and indicators by affected developing country Parties is tied to the question of capacity-building. Particular capacity-building measures are needed in order to enable country Parties:

- (a) To revise NAPs and devise a work programme;
- (b) To devise a mechanism whereby progress can be monitored at national level using locally-identified benchmarks and indicators;
- (c) To compile information through monitoring tools and globally identified indicators with the aim of producing national reports.

II. Format and quality of reports

35. As anticipated, new reporting guidelines for Parties and observers, as well as for SRAPs and RAPs, still need to be devised, using the specific expertise of institutions and/or individuals and considering the outcome of the debates about the ten-year strategy and framework for enhancing the implementation of the Convention.

36. The following sections on affected country Parties, developed country Parties, United Nations agencies and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and NGOs contain important conclusions and recommendations which could furnish the drafting of new guidelines and indicators as requested in decision 8/COP.7.

37. As guiding principles, future reporting guidelines should:

(a) Enable the reporting of activities implemented to achieve the Convention's objectives;

(b) Be user-friendly, consistent, comprehensible and standardized;

(c) Allow comparison;

(d) Make an assessment of progress easy;

(e) Be concise but cover all necessary areas;

(f) Enable a consolidation for subregional, regional and global review;

(g) Reflect, as appropriate, the mandate and commitment to obligations mentioned in articles 4, 5 and 6 of the Convention, and the Regional Implementation Annexes;

(h) Be in line with COP decisions and especially with the ten-year strategy to be adopted by COP 8;

(i) Allow for a comprehensive review within the next 10 years;

(j) Contain provisions for reporting under article 8 of the Convention as well as on NAPs, SRAPs and RAPs.

A. Affected country Parties

1. Proposal for simplified, consistent and efficient measurable indicators for reporting by affected country Parties

Conclusions and recommendations

38. National reporting needs to be incorporated within monitoring at national level with a view to reporting progress towards achieving the Convention's objectives. At the same time,

national reporting should provide standardized information in order to allow the global review at the CRIC.

39. Reporting guidelines should be better structured in order to achieve coherence between subtopics contained in Help Guides (elimination of repetition, logical sequencing of questions) with a view to making reporting more user-friendly.

40. Reporting guidelines would also need to be streamlined with regard to new topics and targets that may be identified at COP 8 in the light of the report of the IIWG and the review of the CRIC.

41. National and global targets would also be required through which Convention implementation could be tracked, as under other Rio conventions.

42. The adoption of a standardized financial annex to national reports is further recommended, in order to record all ongoing and completed projects and programmes relating to the implementation of the Convention.

2. Identification of ways and means for facilitating assessment of the implementation of the Convention at national level

Conclusions and recommendations

43. National reporting cannot be seen as a stand-alone exercise but needs to be integrated into a continuous monitoring process which is clearly defined and supported by adequate financial and technical assistance, and capacity-building, as necessary.

44. With regard to national reporting, a periodic review of work programmes and NAPs in line with the ten-year strategy to be adopted by COP 8 is suggested. This review needs to be implemented and supported through a networking system at national level that makes the exchange of information between line ministries and other involved stakeholders possible, in order for monitoring to become a sustainable and iterative process. The review of work programmes and NAPs should entail a screening of activities at national level that relate to the UNCCD objectives with the aim of reporting on their implementation as part of the official UNCCD reporting. The secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM), according to their respective mandates, are proposed to assist in this exercise and to help to meet deadlines and standards agreed upon by the COP.

45. Quantitative indicators need to be incorporated into the revised Help Guide for affected country Parties, in addition to those used in the country profile. However, in order not to make reporting too complex and hence unachievable, a right balance needs to be struck between the need for standardized information and the objective to use national reports for national planning purposes. This particularly applies to social indicators, which may be particularly difficult to apply.

46. A number of accompanying measures are also required to improve the organization of the reporting process and the procedures for communication of information. These include:

(a) Support for the establishment of compatible information systems, databases or procedures for collecting relevant information at country level and monitoring financial flows;

(b) Synchronization of the time interval between the reporting cycles of all regions in order to facilitate cross-country comparability and trend analysis;

(c) Further collaboration with the other Rio conventions towards a harmonized reporting system, building on the outcome of the pilot study on the Rio Markers.

47. It is suggested that, using a standard methodology, national reports include information on financial resources mobilized and used for the implementation of NAPs, including domestic resources.

48. In line with the outcome of the IIWG, and according to their specific roles and mandates, the secretariat and the GM could advise on how networking at national level could be established and/or improved. Information, including regarding potential financial and substantive technical needs, could be provided to the CRIC for further consultation on this matter.

49. The GM is also requested to provide information on external donor assistance to affected country Parties. Liaison with donor countries and existing financial mechanisms could lead to an improved information management ex ante.

50. The CRIC may also consider reviewing in depth the secretariat's capacity to assist in the reporting process as proposed in this document, with particular regard to providing services in line with its mandate and to the satisfaction of the COP.

3. Proposal on how to integrate into the reporting process the best practices relating to implementation of the strategic areas for action (decision 8/COP.4)

Conclusions and recommendations

51. The review of implementation along thematic topics and strategic areas for action as contained in decisions 1/COP.5 and 8/COP.4 should be undertaken in the future using strategic objectives and, wherever possible, concrete targets, benchmarks and indicators in order to enable the international community to draw quantifiable conclusions.

52. It is suggested that a review of the strategic areas for action as contained in decision 8/COP.4 be done in the light of the objectives and targets that will possibly be identified through the AHWG, and taking into consideration the ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance UNCCD implementation,

53. Similarly, it is recommended that national reports include information on best practices, success stories and lessons learned in the achievement of the operational objectives as spelled out in the aforementioned ten-year strategic plan.

4. Country profiles

54. The AHWG recognized the important role that the CST could play in assisting the COP to review implementation, and in particular in assisting in devising monitoring tools such as the country profile. However, in order for it to do so more effectively, changes in the mandate and the work programme of the CST and even in the timing of its sessions, should be considered in order to maximize the cross-fertilization of information that would benefit both subsidiary bodies.

55. Questions were raised about the working methods between country Parties and the CST and how they impact on reporting. A lack of procedures and mechanisms for reviewing and improving the output of the Group of Experts (GoE) was mentioned as a limiting factor to a successful use of information generated by the CST. Understanding with regard to the roles of the GoE and the CST in reporting would need to be improved. Difficulty in obtaining financial resources for a comprehensive implementation of CST decisions was also mentioned by some members of the Group as a limiting factor.

Conclusions and recommendations

56. Country profiles should become measurable across countries and regions by the provision of harmonized sets of information.

57. Information provided in country profiles should not repeat in tabular form information provided in the narrative part of the report. While the narrative part of the report will focus on activities (implemented or planned) as well as on information relevant to the institutional UNCCD process at national level, the country profile should capture the status of land degradation in a given country.

58. In order to design a new format for country profiles, assistance from the CST could be requested, pending the outcome of the IIWG process. Advice from the CST would also be instrumental in identifying benchmarks and indicators relevant to desertification.

59. Assistance provided by the secretariat and the GM in terms of enhancing accessibility and an adequate processing of information from Parties would considerably improve the CRIC's potential to draw conclusions and recommendations on Convention implementation. To this effect, the COP may wish to consider requesting the secretariat to explore technical options for improved information management relating to national reporting. An in-house study including information on financial needs could be submitted to the CRIC for further deliberation.

B. Developed country Parties

1. Proposal for simplified, consistent and efficient measurable indicators for reporting by developed country Parties

60. Discrepancies between information on external investment flows in reports from the different Parties have frequently been observed and discussed in CRIC sessions. This suggests a need for improved communication among all actors and a common understanding on what type

of development measures are contributing to combating land degradation and desertification. This also applies to affected developing countries.

61. At the first meeting of the AHWG, examples of methodological approaches of sustainable land management portfolio reviews undertaken by a number of countries and organizations were presented as means of streamlining reporting procedures for developed Parties. A six-step methodological approach was proposed by the GM to the AHWG and is contained in its entirety in document ICCD/CRIC(6)/6/Add.1.

Conclusions and recommendations

62. Detailed reporting guidelines for developed country Parties, providing information on support to affected country Parties, need to be devised in order to improve the consistency of information contained in reports from developed and affected country Parties.

63. It is also suggested that information should focus not only on the extent of financial means made available, but also on the impact of investment. To this effect, specific monitoring tools could be integrated into the monitoring systems.

64. In order to improve the effectiveness of the financial analysis of information provided in the reports from developed country Parties, it is suggested that the GM be associated with the preparation of the synthesis and preliminary analysis of these reports.

2. Identification of ways and means for facilitating assessment of the implementation of the Convention at national level

Conclusions and recommendations

65. To specifically improve the format and quality of reporting on financial resources, the proposal contained in document ICCD/CRIC(6)/6/Add.1 suggests the adoption of a standardized financial annex recording programmes relating to the implementation of the Convention. Information on financial flows and investment should be attached to the reports of all affected country Parties and development partners providing assistance in Convention implementation.

C. United Nations organizations and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

Proposal on how to integrate best practices relating to implementation of the strategic areas for action (decision 8/COP.4) into the reporting process

Conclusions and recommendations

66. Reporting guidelines for United Nations agencies and IGOs providing information on support to affected country Parties need to be devised in order to improve harmonized reporting, so as to ensure comparability with reports received from affected country Parties. To this effect, reporting guidelines could also take into account the methodology proposed by the GM.

67. Flexibility in the Help Guides for these stakeholders needs to be allowed in order not to lose information that may be generated, taking into consideration the differing mandates of these institutions and the benefit they could create for the implementation of the Convention.

68. United Nations agencies and IGOs are also to be involved in the review of work programmes and NAPs that is suggested for affected country Parties at national level. Information relating to activities mentioned in these work programmes should be provided in reports by United Nations agencies and IGOs as a mandatory obligation, whereas any other information may be furnished and analysed as is deemed fit.

69. There is a need for a methodology by which best practices and lessons learned can be extracted from information obtained from reports of United Nations agencies and IGOs. In consultation with country Parties, these best practices could be forwarded to the online facility of the CSD, contributing to an enhanced dissemination at international level of information on Convention implementation.

70. Civil society should be involved in the suggested review of work programmes at national level as much as possible in order to identify programmes that have a direct impact on local communities. The new information management and monitoring approach of UNCCD implementation would need to ensure that input from civil society is properly recorded and taken into consideration when making decisions on the work programme or in any of its future reviews. Country Parties will be requested to devise indicators for the successful involvement of civil society according to the specific situations in different countries and/or regions.

D. Global Mechanism and Global Environment Facility

1. Global Mechanism

71. Because the GM is requested to report officially at sessions of the CRIC held at sessions of the COP, the information on its brokerage function between affected developing country Parties and their development partners, and in particular with regard to the mobilization of financial resources for implementation of action programmes, cannot be considered at the same time as the information contained in reports from other Parties and observers.

Conclusions and recommendations

72. The COP could request the GM to provide performance reports on support provided to developing country Parties and, where appropriate, to other affected country Parties at the intersessional sessions of the CRIC. Such reports will enable the CRIC to obtain more information relating to support to implementation and to ensure that relevant draft decisions provided to the COP can take deliberations on this topic into consideration.

73. The AHWG also recognizes the need for specific reporting guidelines to be devised for the GM, based on relevant decisions of the COP on tasks and reporting obligations of the GM (decisions 24/COP.1, 25/COP.1 and 10/COP.3). Such reporting guidelines, to be drafted in line with the ten-year strategy, could be periodically adjusted in accordance with the deliberations of the CRIC on the periodical review of policy and operational modalities of the GM (article 21,

paragraph 7, of the Convention and decisions 9/COP.3 and 5/COP.6) and ad hoc reporting obligations, as required.

2. Global Environmental Facility

74. The AHWG recognized the need for a more in-depth assessment of the support provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), particularly, but not exclusively, through Operational Programme 15 (OP 15).

75. Similarly, difficulties involved in synergistic implementation and reporting were acknowledged, in as much as they refer to the achievement by the Rio conventions of mutual objectives and how they could be reflected in UNCCD reporting.

Conclusions and recommendations

76. The AHWG therefore recommends that efforts should be continued to devise a mechanism for synergistic implementation and reporting that takes into consideration the complexities involved in this exercise.

77. Affected country Parties are requested to report in a more consistent manner on activities financed by the GEF under OP 15 and any other operational programme relevant to the Convention's policies, in order to streamline information provided to the CRIC. To this effect, communication of information between line ministries and information management would need to be strengthened at national level, which ultimately will require strengthening of the national coordinating bodies (NCBs).

78. The AHWG welcomes the first report that the GEF is submitting to the COP, on the support it provides to UNCCD implementation, and recommends that reviews of the GEF report, including of its format, be conducted by the CRIC.

79. Similarly, GEF implementing agencies which avail themselves of funding under OP 15 are invited to report on support provided to UNCCD implementation through GEF funds in such a way that this information is collected and discussed at the level of the CRIC. The AHWG, if continued, could be requested, in cooperation with the secretariat and the GEF implementing agencies, to devise a format that would allow such collection of information. This format should be consistent with the methodology proposed by the GM.

80. The GEF implementing agencies are also invited to involve UNCCD focal points in their monitoring activities and reporting, where this has not been done before. In this way, resources spent on UNCCD-related issues will be duly and comprehensively documented in national reports.

E. The secretariat

81. The secretariat has been requested to report on its activities and programme of work by a number of provisions of the Convention and decisions of the COP. As a result, the same cluster of information is submitted to the COP and the CRIC in different formats, often entailing duplication of work and uneven decisions by the COP.

82. In particular, the secretariat is requested to submit periodically to the COP:
- (a) Reports on the execution of its functions under the Convention;²
 - (b) Reports summarizing the conclusions of the review process;³
 - (c) Comparative documents on the progress made by affected country Parties in the implementation of the Convention.⁴
83. In the past, the secretariat has prepared reports without having a clear format to follow or guidance from the COP.

Conclusions and recommendations

84. The CRIC may consider requesting the COP to address this matter of the secretariat's report through the AHWG, if continued, and in accordance with decisions taken on the ten-year strategy. This should result in the secretariat's being provided with coherent formats for its reports in a way such that information is not duplicated.

III. Organization of the reporting process

85. Following the problem analysis contained in document ICCD/CRIC(5)/9, conclusions and recommendations in this section are made on the assumption that the proposed review of work programmes and NAPs is recognized as instrumental in improving effectiveness in reporting, and is periodically implemented.

86. National work programmes contained in NAPs that are in line with the newly adopted ten-year strategy would become centrepieces enabling the CRIC to comprehensively review UNCCD implementation, while furthering the objectives at national level, i.e. the country-specific context in which desertification and land degradation are impacting on national economies and ecosystems.

87. With regard to the question of alternation and the structuring of a CRIC review, the AHWG identified three possible options for the COP to consider:

- (a) Maintaining the current format of CRIC review by regions, i.e. Africa to report first, followed by other regions (in this scenario the two intersessional sessions would be maintained);
- (b) Conducting a global review by the CRIC using information received by all regions at the same time (it is understood that under this scenario, the CRIC would have in a four-year reporting cycle only one intersessional session);

² Article 23, paragraph 2 (f), of the Convention.

³ Decision 11/COP.1.

⁴ Decision 5/COP.3.

(c) A review conducted by themes but in which all regions would be requested to report at the same time, while themes would be split between the intersessional sessions (this scenario also maintains the two intersessional sessions).

Conclusions and recommendations

88. The AHWG considers the current reporting cycle of four years to be adequate and recommends maintaining it, because it provides enough time to collect information and implement programmes agreed upon at national level. However, it was recognized that a decision on the reporting cycle would have to be taken by the COP, taking into consideration elements of the ten-year strategy as well as the review of the CRIC as a subsidiary body.

89. As far as the alternation of the CRIC review is concerned, whatever decision is taken by the COP on the three options referred to in paragraph 87 above, information on resources mobilized by country Parties and on the impact of investment should always be included within the topics under review.

90. After the completion of the review cycle, work programmes and NAPs should be revised, following the results and findings of the national reviews initiated by individual countries and the global review undertaken by the CRIC. It is recommended that the reporting guidelines be updated with elements that could enable the CRIC to review information on this process in order to draw conclusions and recommendations for future review processes.

91. Wherever possible, country Parties should be informed on available financial assistance for reporting well in advance (one year) so as to enable focal points and NCBs to collect relevant information from the ongoing monitoring process at national level, to process this information in accordance with the revised reporting guidelines and hence to use the information provided in the national report for a revision of activities at national level.

92. With regard to successful reporting on synergistic implementation, assessments on capacity needs undertaken at national level should be used, where appropriate, in order to improve reporting on synergistic implementation of the Rio conventions at national level.

93. The AHWG recognizes that regional meetings in preparation for the CRIC are considered to be instrumental in a successful review of national reports. However, information provided to the regional meetings and their agenda should be more tailored towards enabling focal points and their development partners to draw conclusions and recommendations that may not be regionally specific and which then could be further reviewed by the CRIC. The syntheses prepared by the secretariat should be adapted, therefore, and should respond to this need, whereas other information that may assist country Parties to assess progress made at national, subregional and regional level could also be provided to regional meetings, such as information pertaining to the CST.

94. Regional meetings should also lead to the identification of case studies to be presented to the CRIC as representative of the region. The secretariat and the GM, according to their respective mandates, are requested to identify possible case studies contained in the reports and to prepare the input provided to the regional meetings as a joint activity.

95. Subregional and regional reports should be prepared in accordance with reporting guidelines yet to be devised, and reviewed at the regional meeting before being discussed at the level of the CRIC. Reporting mechanisms, including the identification of the entity(ies) entrusted with reporting on SRAPs and RAPs, have to be agreed upon.

96. In order to enhance information on the integration of stakeholders into the reporting process, it is suggested that reports on validation meetings, including information on participation, will be forwarded to the secretariat prior to the CRIC session in order to assess how such meetings have assisted in stakeholder integration and the review of UNCCD activities at national level.

97. In order to produce good quality reports, time, monitoring methodologies, human capacity and external technical assistance, as well as predictable financial resources, are required to support national reporting. It is then recommended that the COP consider pursuing a dialogue with the GEF and its implementing agencies suggesting that national reporting and its preparatory and monitoring activities become a standing item to be sustainably supported by GEF funding.

IV. Communication of information other than national reports

Conclusions and recommendations

98. It is recommended that any ad hoc report called for by the COP be governed by specific terms of reference (ToR) contained in the related COP decision, describing a detailed course of action and clearly defined objectives with a view to producing a structured input for the COP to consider.

99. In the light of the fact that decisions of the COP need to be consistent over time and to ensure unequivocal implementation by Parties, it is recommended that the secretariat be requested to produce, by COP 9, a compendium of COP decisions relating to reporting, to advise on conflicting or overlapping decisions that make proper compliance by involved stakeholders difficult.

100. The COP may also wish to decide on a mechanism to address overlapping COP decisions and decisions on the same subject but with no expiry date, so that no uncertainty exists about reporting obligations. The secretariat could be requested to draft detailed recommendations for consideration by the COP or by an ad hoc committee established for this purpose.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

101. Based on the preliminary conclusions and recommendations of the AHWG, the CRIC may wish to recommend that the COP establish appropriate mechanisms including reconducting the AHWG and changing its ToR in order to complete the work undertaken by the group in the light of the deliberations at COP 8 on the ten-year strategy and the review of the CRIC as a subsidiary body.

102. In the context of the preparation of new reporting guidelines, it is recommended that targets for Convention implementation be identified in line with the ten-year strategy, clearly

defining what falls under the UNCCD, in order to allow the CRIC to improve review outcomes and to enhance the effectiveness of the decision-making process of the COP.

103. The CRIC, in consultation with the CST, may consider making recommendations to the COP with regard to CST input and CST issues relating to reporting and in consideration of the complementary roles of these two subsidiary bodies.

104. Being fully aware that the mandate of the CRIC is to be reviewed by COP 8, the AHWG would like to draw to the attention of the COP that the potential CRIC workload suggested in this document could be considered when deciding on the future mandate and modalities of the CRIC. This is particularly the case for the forthcoming two sessions in 2008 and 2009 prior to the launching of the new reporting cycle.

105. In order to assess progress made in providing assistance, it is recommended that activities undertaken jointly by the secretariat and the GM be included in the joint work programme of the two organizations and reviewed as part of their respective performance reports.

106. In order to conduct the proposed review of work programmes and NAPs effectively, both the secretariat and the GM should assess human resources requirements for assisting in the proposed review process at national level. The COP may wish to take the additional workload entrusted to these two organizations into consideration when reviewing budgetary means made available, as well as when discussing performance and the possible reorientation of their mandates.

107. The COP may also take into consideration that in order for affected country Parties to respond to the new monitoring and reporting requirements, timely and predictable financial and human resources are required following the outcome of the suggested assessment to be tabled at CRIC 7. The COP may decide to request the Executive Secretary to further the debate on such support to be rendered by the GEF and other financial institutions in order to achieve greater monitoring capacity at national level in affected country Parties and a consequent higher quality of national reports.

108. In order not to lose the momentum for reporting on the Convention's contribution to achieving the MDGs, the Executive Secretary could be requested to distil information for a special report on this topic, to be discussed at the COP. Likewise, in the context of the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the CSD, it is recommended that the secretariat be tasked to feed into the best practices website created for the follow-up of the CSD process by using national reports and other existing information systems at regional level, thereby linking UNCCD implementation directly to the outcome and achievements of the international community in delivering the MDGs.

Annex I

[ENGLISH ONLY]

Reporting under other relevant conventions, agencies and bodies¹

A. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1. Following completion of the trial period for inventory reporting and review, annual review of individual inventories of each Annex I Party became mandatory in 2003 (decision 19/CP.8). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) inventory review guidelines, adopted in 1999 (decision 6/CP.5) and revised in 2002 (decision 19/CP.8), ensure that the reviews are conducted consistently in a technically sound manner. Annual review ensures that adequate consideration is given to recalculations and emission trends over time.

2. The review of greenhouse gases (GHG) inventories comprises three stages. Each stage complements the previous one, and ensures that the process as a whole provides a thorough and technical assessment of the inventory and of conformity with the UNFCCC and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) guidelines. Each stage of the review is finalized with a review report which is published on the UNFCCC secretariat website.

(a) Initial check: immediate quality assurance check to verify that the inventory submission is complete and in the correct format. The result is a status report whose main purpose is to provide a brief check of completeness of the inventory submission, mainly based on the Common Reporting Format (CRF).

(b) Synthesis and assessment: Part I compiles and compares basic inventory information, such as emission trends, activity data and implied emission factors, across Parties and over time. Part II provides a 'preliminary assessment' of the inventory of individual Parties. The identification of potential problems in this assessment is an important input to the individual review stage.

(c) Individual review: international teams of sectoral inventory experts examine the data, methodologies and procedures used in preparing the national inventory. Reviews are conducted as a centralized review, where 5–8 inventories are reviewed by an expert review team (ERT) convened at the secretariat, a desk review, where 3–5 inventories are reviewed by experts based in their home countries, or an in-country review, where a single inventory is reviewed by an ERT in the Party under review. This is the most important and detailed review stage.

3. The annual inventory review process requires the participation of over 120 skilled experts per year. Members of ERTs are selected by the secretariat from experts nominated by Parties. The secretariat selects experts to ensure coverage of all inventory sectors, and to

¹ Information provided in this annex is reproduced as it appears in official documentation of the body concerned, including those documents published on their websites, with no formal editing by the secretariat.

achieve an overall balance in the participation of experts from Annex I and non-Annex I Parties, as well as geographical balance among them. Two lead reviewers, one each from an Annex I and a non-Annex I Party, guide the work of the teams.

4. Participation of experts nominated by Parties helps to ensure that the review results are objective, credible and recognized by Parties. In addition, it helps build inventory capacity across all Parties. Reviewed Parties receive technical feedback from other experts that enables them to further improve their inventories. And experts who participate in reviews gain knowledge of inventory practices of other countries, which they can take home and apply to their own inventories.

5. As of 2004, all members of ERTs participating in the technical review of GHG inventories must sign an agreement for expert review services. The agreement specifies the responsibilities, expected time commitment, and appropriate conduct for ERT members, in particular with respect to the protection of confidential inventory information, as determined by the Conference of the Parties (COP). Any new ERT members must also successfully complete training on how to perform a review.

6. Under the UNFCCC review guidelines (FCCC/CP/2002/8), expert teams for review of GHG inventories are to be led by two experts with substantial inventory review experience. For each team, one lead reviewer is to be from a non-Annex I Party, and one from an Annex I Party. These lead reviewers have a special role in guiding the review teams to ensure the quality, consistency and objectivity of the reviews. Recognizing the special role of lead reviewers, the COP requested the secretariat to organize meetings of lead reviewers to promote a common approach by ERTs to methodological and procedural issues encountered in the inventory reviews, and to make recommendations to the secretariat on ways to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the inventory reviews. The secretariat has conducted four meetings of inventory lead reviewers.

B. Convention on Biological Diversity

7. Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have adopted a Strategic Plan for implementation by 2010 aiming at a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss at the global, national and regional level, as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth. National reporting is seen as an important opportunity to assess progress made towards the 2010 targets defined in the Strategic Plan for implementation.

8. Guidelines for previous reporting (in the form of a questionnaire) have been abandoned since they were deemed less helpful for review and decision-making processes under the Convention, focusing too narrowly on COP decisions addressed to Parties rather than providing a complete picture of national implementation.

9. Current guidelines were prepared according to guidance provided by the first meeting of the Working Group on Review of Implementation (WGRI recommendation I/9, Annex II, endorsed by COP 8 in its decision VIII/14).

10. Information contained in national reports follows three major chapters i.e. status, trends and threats (chapter I), implementing National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

(NBSAPs) (chapter II) and mainstreaming biodiversity (chapter III). Chapter IV of reports draws upon the information in the first three chapters of the report to analyse how national actions to implement the Convention are contributing to the achievement of the 2010 targets and relevant goals and targets of the Strategic Plan.

11. Throughout the report, Parties are requested to emphasize, where possible, the following types of information:

- (a) Outcomes and impacts of actions or measures taken to implement the Convention
- (b) Success stories and case studies, if any
- (c) Major obstacles encountered in implementation
- (d) Actions that need to be taken to enhance implementation.

12. In addition, Parties are encouraged to complement narrative reporting with any tables, figures or graphics that might help to support or to communicate better the information presented. Length of reports is expected to be at least 40 and no more than 100 pages, including appendices.

13. Supporting tools are developed to assist Parties in preparing their fourth national reports, including a guide, an online support facility and a sample report.

14. Parties are encouraged to use indicators in their national report, including those developed at the national and global levels. Biodiversity indicators are important tools for monitoring the status and trends of biodiversity at various levels. They serve as communication tools to summarize data on complex biodiversity issues and can be used to signal key issues that need to be addressed through policy and management interventions.

C. Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

15. The format for the preparation of National Reports to the Ninth Conference of the Parties to Ramsar (COP9) in 2005 was prepared in the light of the experience of Parties in using the COP8 National Report Format and the experience of the Ramsar Bureau in handling the information submitted by Parties in their reports to COP8.

16. The format is intended to mirror the structure of the Strategic Plan 2003–2008 and follows Resolution VIII.26 on “The Implementation of the Strategic Plan 2003–2008 during the triennium 2003–2005 and National Reports format for Ramsar COP9”.

17. Other actions called for by Parties in the COP8 Resolutions are also included when they are applicable to Contracting Parties. The format has been designed and prepared to be used as an electronic tool (i.e. not in hard copy). Explanatory notes are provided.

18. Reports follow a structured questionnaire approach, using the reporting and planning framework provided by the Ramsar Bureau. In addition, a separate appendices/site supplement document has been created to give further detail in answer to some of the questions.

19. In 2005 efforts were also made to enhance collaboration between the Ramsar Convention and the CBD, particularly when looking at the common interest in targets and indicators. Practical mechanisms for better harmonizing implementation and reporting between the two Conventions were made which lead the way in the much requested and expected harmonization between multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

20. Members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and the Ramsar secretariat have contributed to the development of the proposed CBD indicators for assessing achievement of the 2010 biodiversity target, through participation in the Montreal expert group meeting.

21. In a related exercise, Ramsar Parties have requested the STRP to develop a set of indicators for “assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention”. The STRP has focused on identifying a set of ecological “outcome-oriented” indicators designed to complement the largely “process-oriented” indicators embodied in National Reports from Parties.

22. Data for some of these indicators will be collected at site level and then aggregated, but for others will be handled and presented at the river basin, biogeographic region or global scales. The Panel has also recognized the value of starting with qualitative, questionnaire-based methods for information acquisition, especially where quantitative data is lacking at present.

23. The STRP has also recognized that there is still a serious lack of quantitative data at a global scale on the distribution, status and trends of many wetland types, both inland and coastal.

D. Commission on Sustainable Development

24. The third cycle of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will start with the review year at CSD-16 (May 2008) and continues with the policy year at CSD-17 (2009).

25. According to the Commission’s multi-year programme of work, the third cycle focuses on six main thematic issues: Africa, Agriculture, Desertification, Drought, Land and Rural Development. As in each cycle, the thematic clusters of issues will be addressed in an integrated manner, taking into account economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. In addition, a review will be undertaken in 2008 of the implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) target on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Countries are also being asked to provide updated information on national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) and national programmes on indicators for sustainable development.

26. The CSD encouraged countries to provide national reports, on a voluntary basis, in particular to the Commission’s review sessions. In doing so, the Commission underscored that the reporting should:

(a) Reflect the overall progress in all three dimensions of sustainable development, focusing on the thematic cluster of issues for the cycle;

(b) Focus on concrete progress in implementation;

- (c) Include lessons learned and best practices;
 - (d) Identify actions taken;
 - (e) Highlight relevant trends, constraints, challenges and emerging issues;
 - (f) Incorporate, where relevant, the effective use of indicators for sustainable development.
27. A separate web-based case study database was established where case studies can be submitted for downloading.
28. Guidelines for reporting on the topics under review were circulated in a form of a short questionnaire.

Annex II

[ENGLISH ONLY]

Membership of the Ad Hoc Working Group

Members

African Group

Mr. Djunganumbe Etumesaku (Democratic Republic of the Congo)
Mr. Ababu Anage (Ethiopia)
Ms. Gogo Banel Ndiaye Macina (Senegal)
Mr. Bongani Simon Masuku (Swaziland)
Mr. Mohamed Ismail (Tunisia)

Asian Group

Mr. Naser Moghaddasi (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Mr. David Fong (Samoa)
Mr. Ranasinghe Semasinghe (Sri Lanka)
[Mr. Warapong Waramit \(Thailand\)](#)
Mr. Muhamet Durikov (Turkmenistan)

Eastern European Group

Mr. Sajmir Hoxha (Albania)
Mr. Ashot Vardevanyan (Armenia)
Mr. Uladzimir Sauchanka (Belarus)
Ms. Ivana Biková (Czech Republic)
Mr. Pavol Bielek¹ (Slovakia)

Latin America and the Caribbean Group

Ms. Rosene Reid¹ (Barbados)
Mr. Ramón Frutos (Belize)
Mr. Mariano Espinoza Camacho (Costa Rica)
Mr. Ernesto Reyna Alcantara (Dominican Republic)
Mr. Jorge Guzman Ortega (Ecuador)

Western Europe and Others Group

Mr. Pierre Carret (European Commission)
Ms. Anneke Trux (Germany)
Ms. Anna Luise (Italy)
Ms. Gunn M. Paulsen¹ (Norway)
Ms. Mary Rowen (United States of America)

Advisers

Mr. Franklin Moore, CRIC Chair
Mr. Viorel Blujdea, CST Chair
Mr. Simone Quatrini, Global Mechanism
Facilitator of the Group of Experts of the CST²

Observers

Mr. Sem Chikongo, IIWG Chair

¹ Nomination to be officially notified to the secretariat.

² Vacant as of 25 June 2007, to be appointed.