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**CONSIDERATION OF 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**

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

1. Pursuant to paragraph 1 (a) (vii) of the terms of reference of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), contained in decision 1/COP.5, and in the light of decision 8/COP.7 and its annex, which provides the terms of reference of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on improving the procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties, the CRIC at its fifth session shall consider the document containing the compilation and categorization of submissions by AHWG members describing technical issues experienced in the national reporting process and suggestions for improvement.
2. This document reviews the relevant provisions of the mandate and procedures of the AHWG and provides a synthesis and categorization of submissions received by members of the AHWG by 31 December 2006. Submissions are published in their entirety on the UNCCD website <www.unccd.int/cop/ahwg/menu.php>.

* This document is submitted after the deadline in order to provide Parties with the most up to date information on the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. The Conference of the Parties (COP), by its decision 8/COP.7, established the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on improving the procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the COP. This decision outlines some of the areas to be considered by the group in its deliberation. According to the annex to that decision, containing the terms of reference of the AHWG, the objectives of this exercise are:

(a) To provide guidance to the COP on simplified, consistent reporting procedures and formats for reports;

(b) To clarify and standardize terms and issues targeted in current reporting with a view to their eventual application in the new formats of reports;

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

2. The AHWG comprises 25 representatives of Parties to the Convention, nominated by the regional groups. The Chairpersons of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), as well as a representative of the Global Mechanism (GM), are advisors to the AHWG. The members and advisors of the group are listed in the annex. Decision 8/COP.7 also provides that representatives of relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations may be invited as observers, as well as the Facilitator of the CST Group of Experts and any other resource persons, as necessary.

3. The AHWG members were requested to submit to the secretariat, prior to the fifth session of the CRIC (CRIC 5), documents describing technical issues experienced in the national reporting process, and suggestions for improvement. In order to facilitate compilation and categorization of these submissions, the secretariat has prepared a methodological note and some elements of analysis; these were transmitted to the AHWG members for their consideration. It is understood that the AHWG members have solicited contributions from all the country Parties in their respective regions in order to prepare such submissions.

4. By 31 December 2006, the secretariat had received eight submissions from nine members of the group, representatives from Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Germany and Italy (joint submission), Iran (Islamic Republic of), Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Thailand and Turkmenistan. Information contained in these submissions has been categorized and summarized in the present document, and the submissions themselves are reproduced in their entirety on the UNCCD website at <www.unccd.int/cop/ahwg/menu.php>.

II. INTRODUCTION

5. Decision 8/COP.7 provides that the AHWG will work primarily by electronic and documentary means, both before and after CRIC 5. To facilitate the work of the group, a web page has been created on the UNCCD website to allow interested parties to access relevant information and documentation. A part of this website was reserved to the AHWG members and

other eligible persons to share information and documentation among themselves. An e-mailing list has also been created, as well as a dedicated e-mail address in order further to facilitate such communication.

6. As provided by decision 8/COP.7, members of the AHWG were invited to participate in, and took advantage of, the regional meetings of affected country Parties in preparation for CRIC 5, with the aim of discussing relevant issues with the assistance of regional coordinators, where appointed. The regional preparatory meetings took place as follows:

- Asia: 7–11 August 2006 (Bangkok, Thailand)
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 17–21 July 2006 (Panama City, Panama)
- Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe and other affected country Parties: 24–27 July 2006 (Bonn, Germany).

7. The meeting of affected country Parties of Africa is scheduled to take place on 11 March 2007 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

8. It is proposed that the AHWG convenes its first meeting on the margins of CRIC 5 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to consider the preliminary deliberations discussed by the CRIC on agenda item 7 (“Consideration of 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”). Because this agenda item is scheduled (ICCD/CRIC(5)/1) to be taken up on Tuesday 13 March 2007, it is proposed that the AHWG meets on Saturday 17 March 2007.

9. Decision 8/COP.7 invites developed country Parties and international organizations to develop and/or support capacity-building activities at national level in addressing agricultural, environmental and natural resource management in order to enhance the Parties’ capacity to monitor the processes under the Convention, bridge the information and research gaps, collect relevant statistics data and submit national reports in time, and promote partnerships conducive to participatory assessment processes at all levels.

10. Additional input is expected from the CST (through its Chairperson and, following decision 17/COP.7, from the CST Group of Experts), in particular as it relates to progress in standardization of biophysical and socio-economic indicators and data and information for the monitoring and assessment of land degradation and desertification, both in the context of improvement of country profiles in the national reports of affected country Parties.

11. The Global Mechanism (GM) is expected to provide information and advice relating to the mobilization and channelling of financial resources in the context of reporting on implementation of the Convention.

12. The AHWG may also take into consideration the achievements of ongoing reporting processes, including those of other multilateral environmental agreements, with particular regard to resource mobilization and financing the implementation of the Convention.

13. The AHWG will also, as appropriate, take into account relevant outputs from the Intersessional Intergovernmental Working Group (IIWG) established by decision 3/COP.7, including the long-term vision and strategic plan for the UNCCD.

14. Following CRIC 5, the AHWG will consider the relevant outcomes of CRIC 5, as presented in the report of that session. A technical meeting of the AHWG will then be convened between CRIC 5 and COP 8 in order to facilitate progress and prompt completion of work. It is expected that the final draft of the AHWG report, including its findings and recommendations, will be discussed and agreed upon at that meeting. The final report of the AHWG will subsequently be submitted through the secretariat to CRIC 6.

15. It is provided that the CRIC at its sixth session will review this report, as well as the report of CRIC 5, and make recommendations in the form of draft decision(s) on improving the procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports, for the consideration and adoption by the COP at its eighth session.

III. SYNTHESIS AND CATEGORIZATION OF SUBMISSIONS

A. General remarks

16. Some AHWG members made observations outside the context of the proposed categorization, highlighting issues that they felt needed in-depth discussion later.

17. Several submissions noted the need for the reporting guidelines to become better structured in order to achieve coherence between the various subtopics to be reported on. Improving coherence within the scope of UNCCD reporting poses a challenge, given the cross-sectoral nature of the Convention and the integrated approach that it is required for combating and mitigating desertification. Identifying what falls under UNCCD implementation should be further discussed, taking into consideration the required outcome of the IIWG.

18. Another submission pointed out that a successful national reporting exercise would also require an enabling environment that enables Parties to produce quality reports. Without appropriate and predictable international funding for national reporting, timely provision of funds to country Parties, and sufficient time for the preparation of the report, the entire exercise of reviewing the implementation of the Convention would be undermined.

19. And one submission highlighted the usefulness of web-based discussions for enhancing exchanges among AHWG members. A suggestion was made to post on the AHWG web page documentation prepared by international organizations and institutions dealing with national reporting under other multilateral environment agreements (MEAs). Work currently being undertaken on improving system-wide coherence of the United Nations, and in particular the work on the implementation of MEAs, should also be taken into consideration when looking at ways and means to streamline UNCCD reporting.

B. Format and quality of reports

(a) Affected country Parties

20. Submissions were unanimous in recognizing the **Help Guide as a useful tool to assist Parties in the reporting process**. Nevertheless, they felt that some amendments are required in order to eliminate some repetitions, improve the logical sequencing of questions, and enable

appropriate use of quantitative indicators, and hence allow for a more in-depth analysis. The overriding objective of user-friendliness was highlighted and suggestions were made to focus the Help Guide on major activities to be monitored. One submission questioned how, apart from facilitating assessment of progress made at the global level, national reports or information contained therein can be of use for other purposes (for example, monitoring at national level).

21. With reference to the **adaptability of the Help Guide to country-specific contexts** almost all submissions reported that the present level of flexibility allows country Parties to report according to their specific capacities and availability of information but, at the same time, encourages the improvement of reporting mechanisms in the future. It was noted that reporting guidelines should always foster information management at national level because reporting is a core commitment of all international treaties. Admittedly, reporting under the UNCCD is complex because of the interrelations between causes and effects of desertification, its origins and its localization. Developing country Parties need help to further their capacity for reporting.

22. With regard to problems potentially caused by **using the same guidelines for reporting for countries at different stage of implementation of the Convention**, submissions tend to differ in their assessment thereof. Some members stated that the current Help Guide is of limited use to those countries that do not have a national action programme (NAP), but one submission argued that both the formulation and implementation of NAPs involve necessary institutional and substantive measures in land management, which should be always recorded in national reports. This submission further emphasized that there is no need to establish separate reporting requirements, because there is room for different responses to the various sections of the present Help Guide. Having two sets of Help Guides for affected countries would ultimately result in a more complex review exercise by the CRIC. Yet another submission pointed out that the Help Guide would need amendments, particularly with regard to those countries most advanced in the implementation of the Convention, in order to ensure that progress made over a certain period is duly reflected in their reports.

23. Consensus was not reached on the question of **whether or not there should be different Help Guides for different regions**. Some submissions recognized that differentiated reporting requirements would lead to more focused reporting, better reflecting regional commonalities and constraints; others were against the proliferation of formats because this would impede the CRIC from performing a global review and deny the fact that countries, irrespective of the region, follow similar procedures and encounter difficulties of the same nature in implementing the Convention. As a means to overcome this difficulty, it was suggested that regional indicators be inserted in the Help Guide in order to assess progress made and provide countries with the opportunity to report on more regional aspects.

24. With reference to the problem of **different sections of the Help Guide being responded to differently by Parties**, submissions listed various reasons, ranging from irrelevance or unclearness of the question, to unavailability of the information needed, to lack of time and/or financial support. Others noted that different levels of response are a result of regional peculiarities and hence occur naturally. But the general consensus among submissions received was that the comprehensiveness of country Parties' national reports depends on the capacity to produce documents to internationally agreed standards.

25. Submissions confirmed that **the seven thematic topics identified by decision 1/COP.5 sufficiently represent the main issues in the implementation of the Convention**. The utilization of benchmarks and indicators in reporting on such topics would improve the effectiveness of the exercise but requires expertise and capacities not always available at national level. Another submission suggested that flexibility should be granted in order to allow reporting on other important issues as perceived by each individual Party. On a more general note, one submission linked this question to the ongoing work undertaken by the IIWG, which clearly would impact reporting requirements. The same input requested a better alignment of the seven thematic topics with strategic areas of the so-called Bonn Declaration (decision 8/COP.4).

26. Most of the responses to the question of **whether strategic areas for action as referred in the Bonn Declaration should receive more prominence** were affirmative, highlighting the fact that reporting requirements should be aligned to the various commitments under the Convention. Some stated that it would make sense to focus future reporting on the implementation of the Declaration in reports of affected and developed country Parties. However, caution was expressed that human resources and capacities in affected country Parties should not be stretched to the limit. Another concern was raised with regard to successfully implementing the strategic areas because some are closely related to cultural norms and different value systems, upheld in some countries, that may prove difficult to change. Following this, it is to be expected that future reporting with regard to the implementation of strategic areas would reflect regional differences. In an attempt to delineate the scope for UNCCD activities on the ground vis à vis broader rural development assistance provided at the international level, another submission called for a review of the Bonn Declaration in order to verify whether strategic areas as presented therein are consistent with countries' strategies and reflect realities on the ground.

27. Concerning the **introduction of social indicators relating to the involvement of the civil society** it was pointed out that despite their relevance, reporting on such parameters sometimes proves difficult because figures and statistics disaggregated according to the different stakeholders do not exist at national level. Another submission on a similar theme pointed out that in most cases capacity and resources are needed in order to devise and implement specific programmes for integration of stakeholders that then can be reported on. Until now, programmes that do take a participatory approach into consideration are too few to make a considerable difference at national level. One submission stated that the reporting process should start with collecting information from local stakeholders in order to obtain information on the effectiveness of activities and their impact on the ground. It also calls for a systematic inclusion and involvement of civil society, especially young people and women, within the reporting process.

28. **Insufficient reporting on activities relating to the CST** was identified as a problem. One submission clearly stated that working modalities between country Parties and the CST would have to be improved in order to obtain better results in reporting. Issues flagged included lack of procedures and mechanisms to review and improve the outputs of the Group of Experts (GoE), unclear understanding of the roles of the GoE and the CST, and the need for better definitions and improvement of the inputs to and outputs from the CST. Mention was also made of the lack of understanding of the relevance and substance of CST decisions due to the difficulties of following the deliberations of the CST, on a consistent basis, when only limited funding for participation is made available. A call for intersessional meetings of the CST was also made. Similarly, it was pointed out that funding is required for a systematic implementation of CST decisions at national level, something that is not easy to obtain given the competition for

project support from donors. It was also stated that it is still difficult to foster effective partnerships between national scientific institutions, academia and national focal points. Recently nominated national CST correspondents could assist in this task but without an adequate incentive system and clearly defined tasks of the national correspondent, the collection of scientific data would still prove difficult. Network capacities would have to be strengthened to assist in data collection.

29. The question of **why the difficulty of engaging scientific society into the UNCCD process persists** was answered in several ways. One country stated that the scientific society is adequately represented in the national coordinating body (NCB). But it seems possible that the reporting process is monopolized by one group, resulting in the exclusion of others. Another submission stated the need for capacity-building in order to overcome the problem of engaging the right stakeholders – highlighting the important role that the CST national correspondent could play in this respect. Another submission stated clearly that long-term benefits of CST decisions are not clear and hence it is difficult to promote their implementation. Yet another submission reiterated the need to wait for the recommendations emerging from the IIWG process in order to recommend how best to integrate CST input into reporting.

30. With regard to the limited use **of impact indicators**, most submissions referred to their answers to the question on reporting activities relating to the CST (see paragraph 28 above). Some submissions stated that impact indicators are so far not being used widely in country Parties affected by desertification and are being used even less in projects directly linked to the UNCCD. Reporting therefore becomes difficult and the difficulties are compounded by the more systemic problems encountered with regard to the functioning of the CST.

(b) Developed country Parties

31. Submissions received by AHWG members elaborated in much detail on reports from affected country Parties, as compared to those from developed ones. This is probably due to the fact that reporting requirements for developed country Parties are not as comprehensive and extensive as for affected countries and hence further consideration of this matter is still required by the AHWG members.

32. Some submissions stressed that reporting criteria are not clearly and equally defined for all stakeholders, and so it is difficult to assess whether the obligations of the Parties are duly reported on and subsequently recorded.

33. In addition, it was acknowledged that donors are requested to report primarily on the support that they have provided for the implementation of the Convention, so the information is focused on financial flows, rather than on the impact of the investment and the assistance provided to affected developing country Parties.

34. The lack of homogeneity in this cluster of reports has been noted as a major problem for ensuring **comparability of information provided by affected developing and developed country Parties** and among developed country Parties themselves. It was highlighted that an internal decentralization of donors' financial allocations is making it difficult for some developed country focal points to report on assistance to development. At the same time it was mentioned that comprehensive databases that capture information on external assistance are in

many cases not available in affected developing countries, a circumstance that makes a comparison difficult from the angle of an affected developing country. Data collection and management therefore seem to be the major constraints on achieving consolidated and harmonized information on investment flows.

35. The difficulty of **distinguishing between activities relating to the integrated management of natural resources and measures to combat desertification** was recognized. One submission pointed out that measures to combat desertification are often integrated into large-scale programmes, thereby making it difficult to calculate and report the percentage directly relating to addressing desertification. In this respect, another submission stated that confusion is created by the fact that poverty reduction strategies, sustainable land management activities and other preventive measures are perceived as, and reported within, action directly linked to combat desertification.

36. Only few submissions referred to the **adoption of agreed standards** – the Rio markers developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)) – for donor reporting under the UNCCD, pointing to a possible lag of background information on that specific question. Submissions that did respond stated that the use of Rio markers may assist in harmonization of formats for developed country Parties, also in consideration of the fact that the same Parties are requested to report to more than one Rio Convention.

(c) United Nations organizations, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

37. Regarding reporting by observers, it has been noted that the **content, size and format of such reports differ widely among organizations**. It was noted, however, that, taking into consideration the differing mandates of United Nations organizations, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), any attempt to identify standards and specific guidelines for reporting should ensure that relevant issues deriving from such specific mandates might not be excluded ex ante.

38. The need for more detailed information on the **utilization of Global Environment Facility (GEF) resources**, in particular on funding under the GEF Operational Programme 15 (OP15), was highlighted in many submissions. In this regard, it has been suggested that GEF executing and implementing agencies should prepare a specific report on OP15 for the GEF Council and that this report should be forwarded to UNCCD COP for consideration. Another submission went further and stated that such a report should be transmitted directly to the COP. All such requests were, however, making sure that resources used under different GEF operational programmes, such as those for synergistic implementation, should not be neglected.

39. One submission, more substantive in nature, stressed that reports from these entities should include information on best practices and lessons learned, gap analyses according to their own experience, and information and analysis of sectoral and regional issues.

40. Some submissions referred to the need for the CRIC to consider information on implementation and funding of the Convention at the same time, and called for a full **report from the Global Mechanism (GM)**, including on its performance, to be submitted to CRIC also at its intersessional sessions. Other submissions did not consider this a specific problem and

stated that the current procedure of providing a full GM report to COP and advice to CRIC is sufficient.

41. One submission went much further and stressed that the report on the GEF resources should be prepared by the GEF secretariat and subject to review by the CRIC instead of the COP, together with the report from the GM.

42. In the responses to the question on **how more effectively to engage NGOs in the process of national reporting** there was a slight divergence of opinions. One submission stated that civil society groups should be involved in the reporting exercise through, for instance, actively participating in the validation workshops. Another submission suggested that NGOs and civil society groups could provide their own written input instead, which would have to be attached to the final report of the validation workshop, following an agreed upon procedure, and hence become an integral and documented part of the reporting process.

43. However, another submission was apprehensive of the fact that institutionalizing the input of civil society in the reporting process may exacerbate local conflicts between governments and civil society groups, a matter that could not be solved at the level of intergovernmental negotiating processes.

C. Organization of the reporting process

44. In general, submissions recognized that **peer reviews of national reports at regional meetings prior to the CRIC session** are adequate. Nevertheless, some submissions suggested establishing preliminary review mechanisms, i.e. a review exercise by experts from the respective region under review preparatory to the regional meeting or peer reviews to be undertaken also at the subregional level in order to facilitate more in-depth discussion and include specific subregional topics of importance to a selected group of countries. Judging from the submissions received, it seems, however, that the organization of work of regional meetings may need to be revisited because time management has been mentioned as a defining factor in assessing the usefulness of the peer review exercise at regional meetings.

45. Most submissions were in favour of the present **alternation in reporting, in which African reports are reviewed separately from reports submitted by other regions**, but one submission stated that affected country Parties from all regions should report at the same time in order to ensure that every country is reporting under the same conditions and avails itself of the same assistance provided. Another submission mentioned that whether or not the alternation is to be maintained depends on how the CRIC will be structured. Given that the CRIC as a subsidiary body will be reviewed at COP 8, there seems to be a need to decide on the issue of alternation in conjunction with the terms of reference given to the CRIC by the COP.

46. The present **time interval between reporting cycles** (four years) seems adequate to track trends on a medium- to long-term process like desertification. Only one submission called for a shorter reporting cycle. Another submission linked the frequency of reporting with the time allowed for the preparation of reports. It stated that if four years is acceptable, more time is required to prepare reports in order to allow for a better organization of the reporting process, taking into consideration also perceived shortcomings that currently hamper national reporting i.e. the integration of stakeholders as well as the collection of relevant data.

47. It was commonly recognized that the **short time allowed for the preparation of national reports negatively affects their quality** and the overall effectiveness of the review exercise. Almost all submissions called for more time for the preparation of reports (up to nine months); others stated that the present period would be sufficient if the financial assistance to affected developing countries is provided in time. Some submissions stated that compilation of information required for the reporting should ideally be spread over the entire year and be budgeted for in the national budget.

48. The issue of **comparability of reports over time** was also addressed, and the need to have comparable biophysical and socio-economic data available was stressed. However, this would not necessarily lead to more progress being recorded within the present time span of the reporting cycle. A similar, but slightly different response in another submission called for the development of monitoring tools previously agreed upon (referred to as “development plans”), including specific targets to evaluate whether or not the expected progress was achieved.

49. On the question relating to **problems associated with the financing of national reports**, responses varied considerably. One submission stated that national reporting in developing countries should not depend totally on external assistance, and that basic activities should be financed out of the national budget with funding for complementary activities (such as the validation workshop) being provided by the international community. Other submissions stated that the problem of the lack of predictable and timely support to the national reporting should be addressed once and for all. One submission suggested that the COP should request that national reporting be included for financing under the GEF and the GM, in consultation with the secretariat, in order to ensure a timely disbursement of funds. The amount of financial assistance provided so far to affected developing countries was also questioned, and identified as one of the constraints to achieving high-quality national reports.

50. The national capacity self-assessment (NCSA) was recognized as useful tool to identify **gaps in the capacities of national focal points and NCBs to deliver good quality reports**. Despite their usefulness, NCSAs seem not to be the solution because reporting does not meet the needs of the UNCCD, and funding for the implementation of follow-up activities is not available. Bearing in mind that the UNCCD is only one part of the NCSA exercise, the idea of linking the NCSAs to national reporting may not be appropriate, despite the fact that they provided stakeholders involved in environmental management with a platform for exchange of information and experience at national level. One suggestion even mentioned that training a small number of persons per country is highly desirable in order to provide information on procedures and methodologies to be applied to the UNCCD reporting process.

51. Although the important role of the **validation workshop at national level** was highlighted in many submissions, it was stressed that there is room for improvement, particularly on the integration of stakeholders in the process, on the adjustment of the draft report tabled at the meeting, on the funding needed to undertake an effective exercise, and on the time allowed to stakeholders to submit their amendments.

52. The lack of guidelines for **reporting at subregional and regional levels** was also noted, and a format for such reports was requested by most of the submissions. Subregional and regional reports should also be subject to validation at the regional meeting. One submission stated that the secretariat should be requested to submit a report for regional level activities based

on reports received on thematic network programmes (TPNs). Others said that the reports on subregional action programmes (SRAPs) should be based mainly on information in national reports, but would contain analytical language with regard to more subregional topics. The question of who would compile these reports still needs to be addressed, in the absence of subregional organizations that could be entrusted with such work.

53. Most of the submissions stated that **regional meetings are adequate and important means for obtaining regional input prior to the intersessional sessions of the CRIC** as well as before the CRIC that convenes in conjunction with the COP. One submission stressed that the format of the regional meeting before the intersessional session of the CRIC should become less restrictive. Time should be allowed to review not only the national reports but also broader issues that would yield more comprehensive recommendations on progress made within the regions. The hope was also voiced that the issue of the regional coordination units would be resolved for them to take due responsibility for providing input to the regional deliberations.

54. Almost all submissions addressed the topic of **harmonizing reporting systems under the Rio Conventions**, referring to it as a very positive objective. Nevertheless, institutional complexities at both national and global levels make it unlikely that such harmonization will be achieved under the prevailing circumstances. A call was made for better coordination and circulation of information at national level, by establishing national committees on sustainable development and national environmental information systems. This would require additional specific capacities and financial investments. Taking these complexities into consideration, one submission stressed that some indicators could nevertheless be used to measure synergy among MEAs. One submission stated that harmonization of reporting under MEAs is an internal affair and should be dealt with at the country level.

D. Procedures for communication of information

55. With reference to the **ad hoc reports called for by the COP on specific issues**, it was recognized that without appropriate and detailed guidance by the COP (i.e. specific terms of reference) it would be difficult to obtain satisfactory products. The Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report was mentioned as positive example. Moreover, because different entities are requested to report with different mandates and their contributions vary widely from one to another, it would be very difficult to devise a specific template for such reports.

56. The issue of the **often-limited response by Parties and observers to calls for separate submissions**, in addition to the regular reporting process, was addressed in different ways. One submission interpreted this shortcoming as a result of the limited capacity of focal points of affected developing countries to respond in time, and of the limited availability of ready-to-use information. It was suggested that, in order to organize submissions more efficiently, each regional group could select representatives to respond to the additional substantive requirements from the COP. It was argued that although this would lead to a less representative submission, it would probably be more effective in the end. Another submission said that the important principle of every country being able to respond to the call made by the COP should not be discarded.

57. The **compilation of COP provisions in a compendium** might be a useful tool for facilitating responses to reporting requests, provided that the language is user-friendly. One

submission stated that Parties should not report against individual decision texts but rather provide a comprehensive response consistent with COP deliberations. It was also noted that some decisions, including decisions on the reporting exercise, might become obsolete or require revision once the recommendations of the IIWG are adopted. Coherence between the outcomes of the two working groups was also recommended.

58. Submissions recognized the need to **strengthen the information management capacity of the secretariat**, with particular regard to impact assessment, as a mean to improve communication of information among Parties. Subregional organizations may also be tasked to provide such information in their respective subregions. However, it was stated that more information is required on impact assessment methodologies through web-based information networks and specific training of focal points.

59. The problem of **overlapping COP decisions or inconsistency with previous ones**, particularly on reporting requirements, was also referred in almost all submissions. It was noted that a new decision does not automatically supersede or replace old ones on the same subject, and the COP should decide on a mechanism whereby a decision may become obsolete or be amended. The secretariat was called upon to try to ensure that contradictions in decisions are avoided. In this regard, the proposed compendium mentioned in paragraph 57 would assist in bringing coherence in the decision-making process. Another submission called for supposed inconsistencies in COP decisions to be referred to an ad hoc legal committee.

60. With regard to **the tasks entrusted to the CRIC that should fall within the mandate of the CST, and the general question of how best to coordinate reporting to and by these two subsidiary bodies**, submissions called for further consideration and guidance by the COP. One submission stated that CST should address scientific questions relevant to decision-making but not implementation, in particular at field level. Another submission requested that information generated by the CST that is relevant to the review process should be reported directly to the CRIC rather than to the COP in a bid to streamline the process. It is clear that COP will have to take action to clarify the responsibilities and reporting requirements of the two subsidiary bodies.

61. Many submissions addressed the question of the **proliferation of reports submitted to the COP and its subsidiary bodies** as a consequence of deferring to subsequent sessions items already discussed without resulting in a particular action by COP and adding new ones. Some submissions argued that this does not pose a problem and should be allowed, provided that the rules of procedure are heeded. Others stated that the COP should initiate an investigation, through its subsidiary bodies, to find out why certain agenda items are consistently deferred to the next COP.

E. Country profiles

62. Submissions recognized that the country profile is an important and integral component of the national report, but there was a large divergence of opinions on the **usefulness of the country profile for assessing the state of desertification and evaluating the impact of measures taken to combat desertification**. Some submissions would have preferred site-specific and ecosystem data to be used to these ends, rather than information at national level. On the possibility of using a more sophisticated format for the country profile, one submission expressed caution with regard to the existing capacity of developing countries to comply with

additional reporting requirements. In general, submissions stated that impact indicators to measure activities to combat desertification would need further strengthening but a separate discussion on a new format is necessary in order to do justice to such a complex question. One submission went further and made concrete and detailed proposals on what to include in a new country profile format. This information will be forwarded to the AHWG.

63. It was pointed out that **providing data at subnational** as well as national level may also be useful, depending on the size of the country concerned and the organization of the government administration (federal or central system). There seems to be a consensus that efforts should be made to make country profiles comparable across countries and regions by providing harmonized sets of information. However, some flexibility was requested in the presentation of figures and data in order to properly reflect country specificity. A suggestion was flagged to include regional indicators so as to reflect differences between different annexes.

64. There was no consensus on the question concerning the **desirable ratio between quantitative (measurable) and qualitative (descriptive) data**, because some submissions stated that the country profile should continue to produce quantitative data, whereas others wished for a more flexible approach allowing explanations relating to the process of data gathering. Some submissions explicitly stressed the need for both quantitative and qualitative data with an appropriate balance to be decided upon by the CST and/or its GoE.

65. Most submissions noted that **country profiles cannot be used as a monitoring and planning tools at national level**, because the information they contain is too general for this purpose. One submission pointed out that because country profiles were established for the first time in 2006 using this format, these profiles constitute a baseline against which progress made during the next reporting cycle might be compared. Another submission stated that the country profile has the potential to become a tool for national level planning and monitoring provided that more resources are invested and that the exercise is embedded within a consistent monitoring effort at national level.

66. Submissions uniformly stated that **capacity-building is key to improving the quality of country profiles**. National focal points and NCBs need to be able to communicate reliable data, using information from national statistical survey systems. Some submission stressed the role that CST and regional institutions should have played in developing consistent and relevant guidelines on the use and inclusion of benchmarks and indicators in national reports and country profiles.

67. One submission recognized that **posting country profiles on the UNCCD website would ensure information sharing and communication on UNCCD implementation**. Another submission expressed caution with regard to the financial burden that a comprehensive planning and monitoring tool, together with its related information management requirements at the national level, would bring about. The submission states that the need for appropriate monitoring management at national level would need to be well balanced with the need for additional investment for project implementation because the two would compete for scarce financial resources at both national and international levels.

68. It was also recognized that **country profiles could be used as a complement for other surveys on desertification and land degradation processes** at regional and global levels,

provided that they are further improved, particularly as far as accuracy and reliability of data are concerned.

69. Way and means to **improve accuracy and reliability of information contained in country profiles** were also discussed. Some submissions mentioned a committee comprising representatives from all concerned ministries; others referred to more elaborate procedures and institutional mechanisms which were established in many cases in order to assist in the development of country profiles. Lessons learned from these processes should lead the AHWG to further discuss this issue.

70. There was no consensus on **whether or not benchmarks and indicators proposed by the CST and/or its GoE should be used in the preparation of reports and country profiles**, as requested by decision 17/COP.7. One submission said that benchmarks and indicators should first be applied in NAP implementation before they are used in reporting. Others stated again that capacity-building is a prerequisite for using benchmarks and indicators and producing quality reports. Another submission called for preliminary action by a coalition of Parties having a clear policy in monitoring and evaluation systems in order to initiate this process. The role of the secretariat, in particular the CST Unit, was emphasized in assisting affected country Parties to use benchmarks and indicators in the reporting exercise.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

71. The present document summarizes the submissions received by the members of the AHWG on improving procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and format of reports submitted to the COP, based on their personal experience in national reporting under the UNCCD and the relevant documentation prepared in this regard, including in particular document ICCD/CRIC(3)/8 which contains a preliminary analytical assessment of the reporting process.

72. The CRIC at its fifth session may wish to consider the present document and provide further guidance to the AHWG, taking also in consideration that:

(a) Only a limited number of written submissions were received by the secretariat, and so the present document may not reflect the views of the AHWG;

(b) The AHWG has so far not had the opportunity to convene its first meeting to discuss this complex matter in depth;

(c) By the time of the preparation of their submissions the AHWG members did not avail themselves of the output of IIWG, whose work is presently still ongoing;

(d) The GM and the CST and its GoE have not yet provided yet their expected input to the AHWG.

Annex

MEMBERSHIP OF THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP

Members

African Group

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

Asian Group

Mr. Naser Moghaddasi (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Mr. David Fong (Samoa)
Mr. J.R.W. Dissanayake (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 Bikova (Czech Republic)
Ms. Ketevan Tsereteli (Georgia)

Latin America and the Caribbean Group

Ms. Nicole Scholar-Best (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 Group¹

Ms. Anneke Trux (Germany)
Ms. Anna Luise (Italy)
Mr. Odd Erik Arnesen (Norway)
Ms. Mary Rowen (United States of America)

Advisors

Mr. Franklin Moore, CRIC Chairperson
Mr. Viorel Blujdea, CST Chairperson
Mr. Simone Quatrini, Global Mechanism
Dr. David Anthony Mouat, Facilitator of the Group of Experts of the CST

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¹ The member for the European Community is still to be appointed.