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HIGHLIGHTS OF CCD COP-1 MONDAY, 6 OCTOBER 1997

Delegates to the first Conference of the Parties (COP-1) met in regional groups during the morning and in an informal group during the afternoon to discuss which institution would host the Global Mechanism. Delegates and NGOs attended the NGO Forum and heard presentations regarding the roles of women, traditional knowledge, partnerships and communication building in combating desertification.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair El-Ghaouth convened a brief meeting of the Committee of the Whole (COW) and highlighted the issues for which draft decisions will be needed: the institution to host the Global Mechanism; the budget and programme of work of the Permanent Secretariat for the biennium 1998-1999; extrabudgetary resources needed for 1998 and 1999; interim institutional arrangements with the United Nations; location of the Permanent Secretariat; date and venue of COP-2; establishment of a Committee on the Review of the Implementation of the Convention; appreciation to the hosts, Italy and FAO; and the Rule on the representation on the Bureau of the regional implementation annex countries. El-Ghaouth said he would also prepare text acknowledging the role of the Global Environment Facility in financing activities to combat soil degradation. He said the COW may meet in parallel meetings with the High-Level Segment and may also hold informal evening sessions.

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

An informal group co-chaired by Pierre-Marc Johnson (Canada) and John Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda) discussed two draft documents on collaborative arrangements in support of the Global Mechanism (GM) and the organization to house the GM and its modalities. Negotiations were carried out without prejudging whether IFAD or UNDP would be the institution to house the GM.

In the COW Chair's draft on collaborative arrangements, the US offered amendments to make explicit what the collaboration of the World Bank, IFAD and UNDP, respectively, would amount to, borrowing text from paragraphs 9 to 11 in ICCD/COP(1)/CRP.1. The G-77 and CHINA, stressing the need for institutionalizing arrangements, proposed a number of amendments that were meant to clarify the collaboration and make explicit the commitments of the institutions. The Group also amended language that requests the institution to host the GM to report to COP-2 on collaboration with

the NGO community and other interested organizations, including the private sector. The EU made amendments aimed at enabling a negotiation between the institutions and the COP.

Discussions on the organization to house the GM and agreement on its modalities dealt with the two versions of paragraph 2 referring to the acceptance of either IFAD or UNDP as the host. The UNDP offer states that the COP's acceptance of the revised offer to house the GM would be "subject to approval by the Executive Board of UNDP." The G-77 and CHINA said it was important for Parties to know what this entailed before agreeing on the draft. Some delegates also sought clarification about what was meant by the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) referred to in paragraph 4. There was a long discussion about whether the bidding institutions could make clarifications on questions raised by delegates, which some objected to because they were conducting an informal meeting. Others suggested that questions to institutions should be submitted collectively to allow time for the institutions to prepare answers. Co-Chair Ashe explained that UNDP's statement meant the UNDP's Executive Board would meet in January 1998 and make a formal acceptance of the issue. He also explained what a MOU is, using the MOU's developed between the Global Environment Facility and the sister conventions on climate change and biological diversity.

The G-77 and CHINA said they had not discussed beyond the preambular paragraph of the draft decision on the host organization. It was agreed that the EU would present its proposed amendments for substantive paragraphs 1 to 8.

The EU provided alternative text for paragraph 2 that invites either UNDP or IFAD to house the Mechanism, subject to the development of a satisfactory MOU between the COP and the appropriate body of the host institution. They also proposed alternative text to paragraphs 3 and 4, which mandates the Secretariat to develop the MOU for consideration by COP-2, taking into account: document ICCD/COP.1/5; the co-hosting proposal; and other criteria stipulated in the draft decision, except the budget and staffing aspects. They also amended paragraph 7 to ensure resources mobilized in the interim period are utilized only in line with the agreed functions of the Mechanism.

NGO FORUM

The Plenary Hall was transformed into an NGO Forum for the entire day. One wall of the Hall held colorful displays detailing activities undertaken by several organizations. Presentations were

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organized around four themes: women, desertification, drought and poverty; local experiences and traditional knowledge; partnership building; and building communication.

Women, desertification, drought and poverty: Participants focused on three themes: the role of women in controlling natural resources; women's struggle to prevent desertification; and how the CCD addresses women's role in combating desertification. One speaker noted that, while the CCD has set a precedent for women in grassroots activism, obstacles that remain include: access to credit, particularly through land ownership; capacity building; and greater awareness of natural resources issues. The RIOD Working Group on Women and Desertification highlighted reasons for the failure of dryland development processes: inadequate institutional frameworks that ignore the role of women; unavailability of information, or information not understood by women or directed solely to men; and weak social and economic analyses without reference to gender issues. They suggested strengthening the role of women by: raising awareness with simple documents translated into local languages; holding workshops on grassroots women's perspectives; networking and building strategic coalitions; and providing women access to resources through national desertification funds. Speakers noted women's role and responsibility to provide food at the household level and discussed their problems and needs in accomplishing this goal. Women should be included in all levels of decision-making. The capacity of women's groups to interact with other actors should be developed. Other points raised included the need for: school curricula on gender issues; women's efforts to lobby their own parliaments; national governments to eliminate obstacles for women's participation by the year 2000; and environmentally sound technology that responds to women's needs.

Local experiences and traditional knowledge: Speakers stressed the need to shift from a top-down model to a knowledge system that incorporates traditional knowledge. Examples of traditional knowledge practices include: the use of ants to reduce pests in orange trees in China; irrigation systems that use underground tunnel systems; and nutritional, cosmetic and energy uses of a local shrub in Niger. Also highlighted were efforts to prevent overgrazing in Iran, traditional agricultural indicators used in Burkina Faso, forest protection efforts in Cameroon and water and land management efforts in the Northern Mediterranean. Participants noted the need to develop, promote and disseminate local knowledge.

Partnership building: The workshop considered NGO participation in the INCD process, through regional and subregional activities and in the preparation of National Action Programmes (NAPs). Lessons learned include the importance of mutual respect between NGOs and governments and the need for their participation as equal partners. Based on the experience of fifteen NAPs, there is a need for structures that include state officials, scientific research institutions, NGOs, farm organizations and women's groups. Constraints for implementation of NAPs include poor communication at the subregional level, insufficient capacity to control pests, inadequate legislation, low priority to pastoral concerns, civil strife and inappropriate technologies.

Building communication: Speakers noted that participatory implementation requires good communication of the problem and the solution. Participants learned of efforts in Uzbekistan to connect to the Internet, which resulted in an NGO-established e-mail server. For those areas where phone calls to connect to servers are too expensive, one solution is to fund a central server that can distribute

hard copies of information to the local community. Participants also learned about Canada-Sahel groups in Canada, whose consciousness raising efforts focus on the causes of desertification and how countries of the North can react. A representative of the African region detailed a three-pronged project created to promote public awareness: a traveling exhibition on desertification; the organization of public meetings, debates, workshops and courses; and the organization of area-specific projects. A representative of peasant farmers from the peanut growing Sahel region described efforts to build communication and community participation in the decision-making process. He noted the importance of targeting groups effectively in strengthening partnerships between NGOs and grassroots communities by appealing to religious and community leaders, children, women and peasant organizations. Efforts in the Gambia to instruct Islamic community leaders about the Convention, given their influence and power within the community, were also discussed. The Workshop concluded with a skit that portrayed a meeting between donors and community leaders. It demonstrated that ideas of participation vary in different communities. These differences, combined with language differences, alien ways of problem analysis and the short time periods in which evaluations take place, can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. The role of media outreach was noted during the discussion period. Another participant, supported by INCD Chair Kjellén, said the drama highlighted the important role of NGOs as brokers between donors and local communities. Kjellén also noted the need to respect local knowledge and traditions.

IN THE CORRIDORS I

Delegates suggested that informal negotiations on the establishment of a Committee to Review Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) seem unlikely to be concluded at COP-1. Some stated that they perceive the CRIC to have similar functions to those of the Convention on Biological Diversity's subsidiary body. A number of delegates oppose such a committee due to its cost implications and prefer to wait until COP-3 to consider it. Others note that a practical solution might be for CRIC to meet in conjunction with the COP. Still others question the need for it altogether. Some say the need for CRIC could be evaluated on the basis of what might have been the added value of such a committee during the interim period when the Resolution on Urgent Action for Africa and Interim Measures were applied, and in the light of the gaps of the Committee on Science and Technology. Look for a draft decision by Thursday.

IN THE CORRIDORS II

Delegates say informal negotiations on the Global Mechanism have accelerated due to the realization that the decision on the host institution, either IFAD and UNDP, will be made by consensus and not through voting. As a result, many are more cautious and are paying greater attention to the process of reaching the final decision. The preferred approach of many appears to be through consensus at regional or sub-regional levels.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Thirty-seven statements are expected during morning and afternoon meetings of the High-Level Segment.

COW: Informal consultations on the administrative arrangements and host for the Global Mechanism are expected to continue during the afternoon.