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PROPOSED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE GEF TO THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DESERTS AND DESERTIFICATION

Recommended Council Decision

The Council, recognizing that the International Year of Deserts and Desertification in 2006 agreed by the UN General Assembly offers a unique opportunity for the GEF to contribute to raising global awareness of the threats of land degradation and avenues for addressing the challenges of land degradation and sustainable development, approves US\$400,000 as a special initiative to be added to the GEF Secretariat's corporate budget for FY06-FY07 to support the following activities:

- (a) a review of resource mobilization and status of funding for desertification to be prepared jointly by the GEF Secretariat, the Implementing and Executing Agencies, and the Global Mechanism;
- (b) a forum at the GEF Assembly in 2006 on sustainable land management;
- (c) a high-level roundtable to be convened in 2006 on achieving the Millennium Development Goals in drylands;
- (d) a special session on indicators for sustainable land management at the UNESCO international scientific conference on the future of arid lands;
- (e) a technical workshop on the management of groundwater resources to be organized during the World Water Week in August 2006; and
- (f) a contribution to the UNU Algiers final policy conference for the IYYD to facilitate participation of key stakeholders from affected countries.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The GEF Council at its meeting in June 2005, requested the Secretariat, in collaboration with the GEF Implementing and Executing Agencies, to explore ways and means through which the GEF could contribute to the IYDD and prepare a report for consideration at the Council meeting in November 2005. This note is prepared in response to that request and proposes a number of activities through which the GEF could contribute to this international effort.

2. The GEF, since 1991, has provided incremental grant financing to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition to address land degradation, a major global environment and sustainable development issue within its mandate. Until October 2002, the GEF's support focused on addressing land degradation issues as they related to the focal areas biological diversity, climate change, and international waters.

3. To further improve GEF assistance to affected countries in the area of land degradation, the Second GEF Assembly in Beijing, October 2002 designated land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation, a focal area of the GEF. This designation made sustainable land management a primary focus of GEF assistance to achieve global environment benefits within the context of sustainable development. The UNCCD/COP 6 in 2003 designated GEF as a financial mechanism of the Convention pursuant to Article 20 paragraph 2(b) and Article 21 of the Convention and in accordance with the GEF Instrument as amended.

4. The UN General Assembly at its fifty-eighth ordinary session, adopted resolution A/RES/58/211 which declared 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD). The resolution aims at raising public awareness of the knowledge and traditions of those communities living in deserts or affected by desertification processes, galvanizing efforts to protect their biological diversity and economic values, and creating a momentum for the implementation of the UNCCD. The resolution, among other things:

- (a) designated the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD as the focal point of the year, in conjunction with UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other relevant bodies of the United Nations;
- (b) invited all countries to establish national committees or focal points and to celebrate the year by arranging appropriate activities;
- (c) called upon all relevant international organizations and Member States to support the activities related to desertification, including land degradation, to be organized by affected countries, in particular African countries and the least developed countries; and
- (d) encouraged (i) countries to contribute, as they are able, and (ii) the UNCCD to undertake special initiatives in observance of the year with the goal of enhancing the implementation of the Convention.

5. The International Year of Deserts and Desertification is a significant event that offers a unique opportunity for the GEF to contribute to raising global awareness of the threats of land degradation and avenues for alleviating the problem that the GEF has supported.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE IYDD

6. The celebration of the IYDD is expected to lead to the achievement of a set of concrete and measurable objectives for:

- (a) long-term oriented implementation of the UNCCD through targeted community, national and international events with the aim of enhancing the implementation of the Convention;
- (b) awareness of desertification implications on food security, poverty, migration and conflicts in the context of the MDGs. The specific objective would be to profile desertification as a major threat to vulnerable ecosystems and to mankind, reinforced under the scenarios of climate change and loss of biological diversity;
- (c) networking with all the stakeholders using innovative partnerships with Parties, national and international organizations, civil society, academic institutions and private sector corporations; and
- (d) dissemination of information focusing attention on the causes, nature and consequences of human activities in spreading desertification throughout all regions of the planet.

7. The GEF subscribes to these objectives through its operational program on sustainable land management whose main goal is to catalyze partnerships with other organizations working on land management issues, land users, and other stakeholders at the local, national, regional and global levels to provide coordinated financial and technical support to address land degradation in a way that achieves long term global environmental benefits within the context of sustainable development. The GEF considers the IYDD to be an important opportunity to bring about broad awareness in the international community of environmental issues of global importance such as land degradation, especially desertification and deforestation. In this respect, the GEF has supported similar initiatives in the past such as activities undertaken to support the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

III. ORGANIZATION FOR IYDD

8. In order to establish a common UN strategy, objective and program for the celebration of the IYDD, an inter-agency committee has been established to bring together the main institutions active in the UNCCD implementation process including FAO, IFAD, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, the World Bank, and the GEF. The group provides guidance to the UNCCD Secretariat on the preparation of the program for the IYDD.

IV. PLANNED ACTIVITIES OF THE IYDD

9. The main objective of events at the international level will be to launch an ambitious information and awareness raising campaign through the promotion of activities in the field of media, communication and culture. The following list shows the magnitude of commitments to the IYDD so far by a variety of partners.

Stamp production

10. The Council of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) has adopted this activity and sent a circular in the six UPU official languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese) to national postal administrations worldwide, encouraging the production of stamps for the promotion and commemoration of the IYDD. A similar request has been addressed to the United Nations Postal Administration (UNPA) for the production of a series of stamps portraying the two issues at stake: deserts and desertification.

Training kit production

11. Based on the success of the first edition of the UNESCO-UNCCD education kit on combating desertification which was widely diffused to primary schools in countries affected by desertification, UNESCO expects, in cooperation with the UNCCD Secretariat, to issue a new edition of the kit, labeled "A creative approach to environmental education in drylands and highlands".

An International Film Festival

12. An International Film Festival on deserts and desertification, "Desert Nights" will be organized by the Government of Italy. The films presented at the International Film Festival would portray daily life in drylands.

A major archeological and cultural exhibition

13. A Major Archeological and cultural exhibition on the deserts of the world, will be held in Rosenheim, Germany organized by the Government of Bavaria, from March to October 2006. Using an interactive approach, the exhibit will portray the origin and changing face of deserts over thousands of years.

Production of major publications and awareness documents

14. UNEP is planning to launch two publications on the occasion of the IYDD: the first, entitled "Global Environmental Outlook for Deserts Report" (GEO-Deserts) is expected to be published in June 2006 to mark the World Environment Day and the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, 5 and 17 June respectively. The second publication, highlighting UNEP's activities in drylands environmental management, is to be launched in September/October 2006. UNDP is also preparing a challenge paper entitled "Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the Drylands". This will be available for discussion during

the Conference of the Parties to the CCD to be held in Nairobi in October 2005, and the final version will be published early in 2006.

15. In 2006, UNEP and FAO will start with the implementation of the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) Program, supported by the GEF, which will assess the status of and environmental trends in dryland ecosystems and should provide and disseminate a number of information and awareness documents. At the same time, the assessment will provide the GEF land degradation focal area with parts of its program baseline that will be completed by data from other assessments such as the forest resource assessment 2005.

16. IFAD has established an interdepartmental working group to develop a communication plan with the aim of enhancing the objectives of the IYDD. In collaboration with the Global Mechanism, it will prepare a showcasing of IFAD's experience, with particular emphasis on women and desertification. IFAD will also prepare a learning note on the UNCCD to draw lessons from relevant country and project case studies to facilitate mainstreaming of the objectives of the Convention.

Conferences and seminars

17. UNESCO, in collaboration with the UNCCD Secretariat, FAO, UNDP, UNEP, IFAD, United Nations University (UNU), United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Relief (UNISDR), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), GEF, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), the International Council for Science and other partners, is planning to organize an international scientific conference, entitled "The Future of Drylands", in Tunis, Tunisia at the end of June 2006. It will take stock of 50 years of experience in dryland studies, policies and development programs and help to redefine future priorities to promote sustainable development in the world's drylands.

18. UNEP is planning a scientific conference on the theme "Dryland Environmental Management and the Millennium Development Goals", to be held tentatively at its headquarters in Nairobi, in September/October 2006.

19. Based on the "Joint Program of Work on the Biodiversity of Dry and Sub-humid Lands", the secretariat of the UNCBD will collaborate with the secretariats of the UNCCD and the UNFCCC to hold a series of regional workshops in Asia or Latin America and the Caribbean in 2006 on synergies between the conventions. The objective will be to stimulate the implementation of the "Joint Program of Work on Dry and Sub-humid Lands and Agricultural Biodiversity".

20. FAO will be promoting dialogues on forestry in eastern, southern and western parts of Africa in collaboration with sub-regional organizations.

21. The Government of Spain has indicated interest in organizing a seminar on desertification, poverty and migration.

22. The Government of Spain will also be hosting a major North-South dialogue conference on the future of sustainable pastoralism, supported with incremental GEF resources from the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism (MSP).

23. The UNCCD Secretariat is planning three thematic meetings to be held in different geographical regions on:

- (a) *Latin America*: Assessment and review of the CCD implementation at global level (venue: Argentina)
- (b) *Asia*: Women and Desertification. Assessing the convention's contribution to the recommendation of the Beijing + 10 summit, (venue: China)
- (c) *Africa*: Youth and Environment. Lessons learnt and perspectives from the "Green Points of the Sahel" project. (venue: Mali)

24. The UNCCD Secretariat is assisting countries in planning and organizing activities to celebrate the IYDD. So far 20 countries have confirmed plans to contribute to the IYDD. To further assist the countries in these preparations, UNDP is putting in place a process for communicating information on the IYDD to UNDP Resident Representatives so as to encourage active country level participation during the celebration of World Day to Combat Desertification and support advocacy efforts for hunger and poverty eradication in the drylands. UNDP will also support a number of countries celebrating the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, thus raising the profile of the events in each country and publicizing the overall effort globally.

V. GLOBAL OUTREACH FOR IYDD

25. The UNCCD Secretariat intends to create a “one-stop-shop” IYDD website. This website will be linked to the UNCCD homepage and present all activities online. It also intends to strengthen the networks of journalists and other relevant information providers. By the end of 2006, it is expected that a large network of environmental journalists in both, developed and developing countries will have a better understanding of the global relevance of deserts and desertification. Furthermore, it is also expected that target groups, including government representatives, NGOs, local communities and the general public will be benefiting from the dissemination and sharing of a growing array of best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of dryland management projects through a variety of media channels.

26. To provide the visibility required for a successful promotion and celebration of IYDD worldwide, the UN Secretary General has nominated two UN Honorary spokes-persons for the event: Mr. Cherif Rahmani, Minister of Environment of Algeria and President of the World Desert Foundation, and Prof. Wangari Mathai, Deputy Minister of Environment of Kenya and 2004 Nobel Prize winner.

VI. GEF SUPPORT TO THE IYDD

27. The following chapter proposes a set of contributions by the GEF to the IYDD. Most of these suggestions are directly linked to the activities described above. For each identified activity, a rationale for GEF involvement is given and a budget is proposed. The Council is invited to consider these suggestions with the objective of approving an overall strategy for GEF's involvement in the IYDD and providing the additional resources that would be required. It is proposed that additional resources be added as a special initiative to the FY06 Corporate Budget of the GEF Secretariat.

28. The GEF Secretariat will report back to the Council on the achievements of the IYDD with a special highlight on the GEF funded activities.

Report on the status of funding of activities related to deserts and desertification by the GEF and the Global Mechanism (GM)

29. In collaboration with the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD, IFAD, UNDP, UNEP, the World Bank and the Regional Banks, the GEF proposes to prepare a major analytical review on "resource mobilization and the status of funding of activities related to deserts and desertification". The output of the analysis would be a joint GEF-GM publication. The publication which will highlight the specific contribution of the GEF to sustainable land management over the past 10 years could be launched during the GEF Assembly and/or presented at the final conference of the IYYD on policy issues to be held in Algiers, in October/November 2006.

Rationale

30. Over the past years, development agencies and the GEF have invested considerable financial resources in support of national and regional efforts to combat desertification and deforestation in drylands through the promotion of sustainable land management. There is, however, no synthetic publication that analyzes and documents the origin, level, financial instruments applied mechanisms, arrangements and flows that underpin these investments. During the CRIC-3 of the UNCCD, the GEF and its implementing, executing and collaborating agencies were criticized by the parties on the lack of information on the volume and nature of external investments that directly or indirectly helped the countries achieving the convention goals within their national development priorities. This analytical review will fill this gap and contribute to the development of national financing strategies for mainstreaming UNCCD/NAP into national development frameworks.

Budget

Total: **US\$ 125,000**
GEF: US\$ 50,000 for the preparation and publication of the document.
Others: US\$75,000 in co-financing from other partners.

IYDD Forum at GEF Assembly

31. It is proposed that at the GEF Assembly in 2006, a special forum is organized on GEF's contribution on the prevention and control of desertification and deforestation through the promotion of an integrated approach to sustainable land and water management. The discussion forum will reflect on achievements of the GEF in combating land degradation within its mandate over the past 10 years as well as on the way forward for the coming decade.

Rationale

32. Since 1991, the GEF has provided, within its mandate, incremental grant financing to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition to address land degradation as a major threat to the global environmental system and in this context, to sustainable development. Over these years, the GEF has advocated and promoted an integrated approach to natural resources management and considers this approach as one of the most effective tools to successfully combat the degradation of ecosystem goods and services. A forum organized during the GEF Assembly, would focus on the approach as well as its advantages and the challenges posed by its application in the drylands. As part of GEF Knowledge Management function, it would allow GEF member countries to share experiences and identify best practices that will be of interest to other countries. It would also help the GEF to advance its efforts to operationalize INRM in more systematic and structured way.

Budget

Total: **US\$ 125,000**

GEF: \$75,000 to cover the cost of participants from developing countries, targeting specifically CBO and NGO representatives involved in GEF funded projects;

33. Others: \$50,000 in co-financing from other institutions to support their participation and that of international experts.

High-Level Round Table Panel on "Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Drylands"

34. In March 2006, a High-Level Roundtable is proposed which would consider the link between the MDGs and drylands sustainability, as a follow-up to the UN 2005 World Summit. The Roundtable would be co-hosted by the GEF Secretariat, GEF Implementing Agencies (World Bank, UNDP, UNEP) and selected Executing Agencies (FAO and IFAD), in Washington D.C. or Nairobi. UNDP is currently preparing a Challenge Paper on the MDGs relating to dryland issues and has proposed presenting it as a key paper during the event. The proceedings of this event and major GEF-specific recommendations would be presented at the GEF Assembly.

Rationale

35. At the UN 2005 World Summit, governments acknowledged the intricate link between conservation and sustainable use of the global environmental system and achievement of the MDGs. As one key element, they acknowledged that rural and agricultural development should be an integral part of national and international development policies, and noted the urgency of supporting and implementing the UNCCD. In this light, they agreed to address the causes of desertification and land degradation, as well as poverty resulting from land degradation, through mobilization of adequate and predictable financial resources, transfer of technology and capacity building on all levels.

36. Over the past years, the GEF has supported numerous projects in drylands that have contributed significantly to achieving the MDGs, especially MDG 1 on eradicating poverty and MDG 7 on environmental sustainability. The proposed event would help define GEF's contribution to the Summit goals on desertification in light of the MDGs, and would help identify new opportunities for the GEF and its partners to support governments in their work toward environmental sustainability in the drylands. Defining indicators to measure success in achieving MDGs would be of particular importance.

Budget

Total: **US\$ 300,000**

GEF: US\$ 125,000 for the preparation of working documents, travel and subsistence costs of guest speakers and selected key stakeholders from developing countries.

Others: \$175,000 from other partners.

Special session on Land Degradation/Sustainable Land Management Indicators

37. UNESCO is currently organizing an international scientific conference on the "Future of the Arid Lands" that will take place in 2006 in Rome, Italy. It is proposed during the conference, a special session be organized by the GEF and UNDP to discuss the need for indicators on land degradation and sustainable land management. The ongoing efforts of the GEF Inter-Agency Working Group on LD focal area indicators, under the lead of UNDP, will feed into this event.

Rationale

38. The task force of the land degradation focal area is currently in the process of developing a comprehensive indicator framework for sustainable land management that will allow defining and agreeing upon a minimum standard set of indicators for GEF projects and the focal area program. These indicators will allow to measure project impact and, over a longer period of time, the impact of the focal area on the global environmental system. The indicator framework and the derived project and program-level indicators will be part of a larger knowledge management system that will be developed over the coming years. The special session will discuss the opportunities and challenges of defining a common set of indicators for

the land degradation focal area from the point of view of the various GEF partners. This session will also provide the GEF with the opportunity to inform the scientific community and other stakeholder groups on the progress of setting up a knowledge management system for sustainable land management.

Budget:

Total: **US\$250,000**

GEF: US\$ 50,000 for preparing background papers, invite resource persons and organize the session.

Others: US \$ 200,000.

Technical workshop on the management of groundwater resources

39. It is proposed that a technical workshop on the sustainable management of groundwater resources as a means to reduce the vulnerability of land for degradation be organized during the World Water Week in August 2006 in Stockholm, Sweden.

Rationale

40. Drylands are highly dependant on ground water resources and their sustainable recharge for maintaining peoples' livelihoods and essential ecosystem functions. The unsustainable use of groundwater resources is often not recognized and addressed as a cause for accelerated land degradation. GEF has given a priority attention to the management of groundwater resources, with a special focus to the LDC/SIDS. Collaborative work with UNESCO and the international academic and research is being developed under the guidance of STAP. The workshop would contribute to the understanding of the organic links that exist between land and water resources management and need for an integrated approach to land and water management to effectively combat land degradation. The workshop would also bring sustainable land management issues to the attention of the water community during that meeting.

Budget

Total: **US\$100,000**

GEF: US\$ 50,000 for preparing background papers, finance travel and subsistence of resource persons and organize the workshop.

Others: US\$ 50,000.

Contribution to the UNU Algiers Final Policy Conference

41. The Government of Algeria and UNU have requested financial support from the GEF to facilitate a broad participation of stakeholders at the UNU Final Policy Conference that would be the culmination of the IYDD.

42. The Conference to be held in Algiers will review the overall achievements of past activities addressing land degradation and set the agenda for the future. This conference will follow up and build on the outcomes of the various activities carried out throughout the year, including GEF supported activities.

Rationale

43. Facilitating networking with all the stakeholders using patronage and innovative partnerships with Parties, national and international organizations, civil society, academic institutions and private sector corporations, is one of the key objectives of the IYDD. GEF being the only existing multi-convention financing mechanism is uniquely placed to assist IYDD achieve this objective through the facilitation of the participation key players within GEF recipient countries.

Budget:

Total: **US\$ 500,000** (entire conference)
GEF: US \$ 50,000 is requested to facilitate the participation of key stakeholders from affected countries.
Others: US\$ 450,000.

VII. RESOURCES REQUIRED

44. The overall cost of all activities for IYDD will be over US\$ 10million. As described in the forgoing section, a GEF contribution totaling US \$ 400,000 for selected activities is proposed and will be managed as a special initiative under the GEF corporate budget for FY06. The total costs of these activities are estimated at US \$ 1,400,000. Co-financing in the amount of US\$1,000,000 is expected from other sources, including the GEF Implementing Agencies and Executing Agencies. GEF assistance will be largely catalytic and used to facilitate the preparation of background papers, the dissemination of information, and the participation of key stakeholders from developing countries in these planned activities.

ANNEX 1: SUMMARY OF PROPOSED GEF ACTIVITIES AND BUDGETARY REQUIREMENTS

Activities with GEF Contribution	GEF Contribution	Others (USD)	Total (USD)
1. Review of resource mobilization and status of funding for desertification by GEF, GM, and Implementing Agencies	50,000	75,000	125,000
2. GEF Assembly forum on desertification (GEF, IAs, EAs, countries)	75,000	50,000	125,000
3. Roundtable on achieving millennium development goals in drylands (World Bank, UNEP, UNDP, FAO, IFAD, UNCCD)	125,000	175,000	300,000
4. International scientific conference on future of drylands (UNESCO, ICSU, OSS, UNDP, UNU, IFAD, World Bank, UNEP, FAO, ADB)	50,000	200,000	250,000
5. Technical workshop on management of groundwater resources (GEF STAP, World Bank, UNEP, UNDP)	50,000	50,000	100,000
6. Global policy conference on drylands and achievements of IYDD (Govt. of Algeria, UNU, UNDP)	50,000	450,000	500,000
TOTAL	400,000	1,000,000	1,400,000

ANNEX 2: SUMMARY OF IYDD ACTIVITIES WITHOUT DIRECT GEF SUPPORT (ESTIMATED COSTS US\$ 10 MILLION)

ACTIVITIES
Exhibits and outreach
1. Stamp production (Universal Postal Union)
2. Training kit production (UNCCD, UNESCO)
3. International film festival on deserts (Govt. of Italy)
4. Organization of archeological and cultural exhibition on deserts (Govt. of Bavaria, Germany)
Publications
5. Global environment outlook for deserts report (UNEP)
6. Achieving millennium development goals in drylands report (UNDP)
7. Land degradation assessment in drylands (LADA) - (FAO)
8. Women and desertification report (IFAD)
9. Case studies on desertification success stories (IFAD)
Conferences and Seminars
10. Conference on future of drylands (Tunisia, June 2006) - (UNESCO, UNCCD, FAO, UNDP, UNEP, IFAD, UNU, UNISDR, WMO, OSS, ICSU)
11. Scientific conference on dryland environmental management, September 2006 (UNEP)
12. Workshops on joint work programs between CBD, UNCCD, and UNFCCC for Asia, Latin America and Caribbean
13. Forestry dialogue workshops for eastern, southern, and western Africa (FAO)
14. Seminar on Desertification, Poverty and Migration (Govt. of Spain)
15. Assessment and review of CCD implementation in Latin America (UNCCD Argentina)
16. Women and Desertification in Asia (UNCCD China)
17. Youth and Environment (UNCCD Mali)
18. National activities to be organized to support World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNCCD, UNDP)