

Elaboration of Anti-Desertification Policies.

Collaboration Among the Actors Concerned at All Levels

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1. Introduction

Desertification is a phenomenon to deal with which, various actors at different levels have to work together to stop its advancement. Since the 1970s, various attempts have been made at various levels by different actors sporadically with little coherence. An evaluation report on the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD) adopted in 1977 at the UN Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) shows that anti-desertification programmes/projects conducted during the 70s and 80s failed to bring about positive results. One reason for the failure was that programmes/projects executed in the past have not, in general, taken into consideration the most important actors, local populations. Commitment from local people is indispensable for effective and sustainable implementation of planned activities. We would like to present in this chapter, key issues to be kept in mind when elaborating anti-desertification policies.

1.1 The CCD's concept-understanding "participation"

"The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa" (CCD), which was finalized in 1994 and came into force at the end of 1996, has several specific characteristics in contrast with other conventions and agreements concluded at the international level (Katsumata, 1997). The CCD should be most respected for policy making. Some of its important characteristics are presented below. These are the key to the effective elaboration of anti-desertification policies.

First of all the CCD is not a mere presentation of political will and good intention. It defines clearly the duties and rights of convention Parties. This means that both developed and developing countries which ratified the CCD should fulfill their obligations to achieve the objectives of the CCD and international institutions/organizations are also required to put their efforts and resources to work for its implementation. In the framework of the CCD, it is agreed that all concerned actors at each level need to commit to collaboration to tackle desertification worldwide.

Two other characteristics are concerned with participation of local populations and communities. First, the CCD puts great emphasis on the participation of local populations throughout a whole project cycle,

from identification and planning to follow-up and evaluation of anti-desertification activities as seen in Article 3 of the CCD (see Box 1.). This is completely different from the "old-fashioned" measures/approaches taken by donor communities in the 70s and 80s which imposed external knowledge and solutions.

Second, closely related to the above, is that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBO) are recognized as pertinent partners of the National Action Programme (NAP) of each country Party. NAP is an essential framework for the realization of the CCD at the national level.

Box 1. Article 3 of "Introduction" of the CCD

Article 3

Principales

In order to achieve the objective of this Convention and to implement its provisions, the Parties shall be guided, inter alia, by the following :

(a) the Parties should ensure that decisions on the design and implementation of programmes to combat desertification and/or mitigate the effects of drought are taken with the participation of populations and local communities and that an enabling environment is created at higher levels to facilitate action at national and local levels :

(b) the Parties should, in a spirit of international solidarity and partnership, improve cooperation and coordination at subregional, regional and international levels, and better focus financial, human, organizational and technical resources where they are needed ;

(c) the Parties should develop, in a spirit of partnership, cooperation among all levels of government, communities, non-governmental organizations and landholders to establish a better understanding of the nature and value of land and scarce water resources in affected areas and to work towards their sustainable use ; and

(d) the Parties should take into full consideration the special needs and circumstances of affected developing country Parties, particularly the least developed among them.

To better understand the change in measures/approaches occurring in the field of anti-desertification projects, there is a paper which provides a useful framework as regards the concept of participation in anti-desertification projects (Kat-

sumata, 1996). It categorizes the various anti-desertification programmes/projects in West Africa according to a classification that a NGO in the sub-region set up.

First is the "top-down approach," also called the directive type, by which a government, directly and actively intervenes throughout the project cycle. This is also a widely practiced approach in donor communities for executing development projects in general. There is no consultation with local populations during earlier stages of project cycles and no consideration of particular settings at the local level. Under such a situation, people cannot understand the intention or objective of a project imposed on them, so the project winds up a failure. In addition, this type of intervention in anti-desertification projects is realized fully by financial, technical and human inputs of external bodies and becomes too dependent on that. As a result, the project will end once such resource flows stop.

Second is the "partially participatory approach." This is practiced by some NGOs in the subregion. The external agents such as NGOs intervene partially only as a solution to certain specific problems. The principal mode of intervention is to consult with concerned populations or communities of target areas and to respond with the assistance demanded by local populations. This approach is also called the "dialogue-facilitation approach." NGOs play a facilitating role in this approach in order to assist in strengthening organizational and technical capacities of local people and communities by providing opportunities for leadership training and facilitating resource mobilization.

Third and last is the "overall participatory approach" which requires the involvement of local populations themselves throughout the project cycle. All actors, from government officials, institutions, and technicians to local populations and NGOs/CBOs, participate in designing a project and executing and monitoring the activities. In some cases, partial participation or intervention by external agents may observed in order to complement a project's technical aspects.

It can be said that to fulfill what was agreed on in the CCD, policy-makers need to shift from a "top-down approach" towards an "overall participatory approach" in anti-desertification programmes/projects.

1.2 Curative versus preventive measures

It is widely understood that both preventive and curative measures are needed to tackle the effects of advancing desertification. However, the donor community has a tendency to put more emphasis on curative solutions than on preventive ones.

"Preventive action is highly cost-effective," says Grunewald (1998), but the donor community is not really interested in providing affected developing countries with necessary funds for such actions. One of the reasons is that the results of preventive actions are not visible over the short term and some of developed countries claim that it is difficult to convince their own constituencies of the need to use the budget

for such actions. This is somehow true, but there is something else preventing donor governments from committing to preventive actions against the desertification. It could be just a lack of political will of the donor community despite the duties described in the CCD. Of course, a continuous financial flow needs to be maintained until the expected outcomes are realized. The necessity of promising long-term financing also discourages donor's political will.

One concrete preventive measure is to set up a combined programme of early warning/rapid response which should make it possible to get a handle on a crisis before it escalates (Grunewald, 1998). In closely monitoring the climate of affected regions by satellite on establishing research institutions at regional and subregional levels with well-trained personnel in order to predict natural effects on the areas, the programme strengthens the system of drought preparedness in the region.

1.3 NAP and the need for coordination

Anti-desertification programmes/projects need to be implemented at all levels synergistically. The CCD provides various instruments to do that, namely the National Action Programme (NAP) at the national level, and Regional and Subregional Action Programmes (RAP and SRAP). The box below summarizes the process of preparing an NAP.

Box 2. NAP process (extract from UNSO, 1997)

- Designation of a national coordination body (NCB) or focal point (FP) institution for the coordination and advancement of the NAP process. The NCB is the decision making body, while the FP is the operational arm ;
- Initial identification of key stakeholder groups, including local communities, NGOs, government departments, donors, etc. and their representatives to participate in a forum at a national level ;
- Sensitization, awareness raising, and training activities have contributed to providing information on past experiences and current challenges. They have also developed a common understanding of the spirit and contents of the CCD among stakeholders ;
- Identification of key issues for a first forum meeting building a process to engage key participants in identifying priorities and clarifying expectations as to the forum and the NAP itself ;
- Holding of a first forum meeting with the aim of building consensus on the elements and content of the NAP.

"To achieve sustainable impact, the national level is the most appropriate for this integration to occur, particularly in view of the fact that this level provides the framework for implementation at the local level" (RIOD, 1998). Actions at the national level such as NAPs need to become the basis for sub-regional and higher level action programmes. By doing so, synergy is secured and more global benefits will be obtained.

Finally, efforts towards the inter-linking of international environmental conventions (IECs) such the Convention on Climate Change will be required, although challenges to treat cross-cutting issues and functions still exist.

It is obvious that a framework for coordination and synchronization is necessary for the effective implementation of concrete anti-desertification activities. There is a need to maintain a broader point of view and policy makers should not concentrate only on treating micro-environments in the affected regions. Broader aspects of desertification are related to broader policies such as poverty eradication, migration, economic development, population growth, food insecurity, environmental degradation, conflict resolution, etc. There is a need, first of all, to recognize the relationship between anti-desertification policies and global issue policies, and then a need to evaluate the impact of grassroots activities from a broader point of view.

2. Recommendations of the NGO Report at the Conference of RIO+5

The "NGO Report on the Convention to Combat Desertification for RIO+5" (Richard Ledger, 1997) was prepared by a NGO network, RIOD (International NGO Network on Desertification and Drought) for the 10th Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention to Combat Desertification (INCD). The report presents the NGOs' evaluation of the status of the CCD 5 years after the Rio Conference and can serve as a useful and relevant reference in considering anti-desertification policies. Hereunder are some of the details presented in this report.

First of all, it warns that existing and past anti-desertification programmes/projects have highly been

biased in favor of technical support and have ignored treatment of social aspects. This is supported by the fact that access to satellite technology and better computer systems, for example, won't make a significant difference in anti-desertification programmes in which most of the actions need to be implemented at the local level. Another fact to consider is that the affected developed countries which already have access to technology generally do not use it in the fight against desertification due to its cost. The report points out that the fight against desertification is not a mere technical issue but a social agenda requiring changes in the society and administration of the government.

The report repeatedly uses the term "consultative mechanisms" which is one of the concrete instruments for facilitating the community participation in implementing the CCD. Consultative mechanisms are, in practice, meetings among various actors, such as villagers, local government officials, NGOs/CBOs active in the local area, donors, etc. They could be organized meetings in a government office or could be a technical visit to a project site by donors or foresters. In these, external expertise/resources and local population/expertise are brought together in accordance with the identified local needs. They can also work as a promotional instrument for decentralizing the decision making process. By exchanging points of view with each other at a meeting and sharing technical information on specific issues at the grassroots level, both government and communities can advance mutual understanding and local populations are able to influence the decision-making process.

The common anxiety shared by the NGOs interviewed in the report was that governments tended to go ahead too far and too fast with the CCD process in

Table 1. Critical issues and priorities repeatedly raised over INCDs which impact on the implementation of sustainable management of drylands

issue	details
Learning the lessons of the past	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • causes of past failures were top-down approaches • negligence of locally developed solutions
Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relation between water balance and desertification • climate change causes environmental pressure on drylands
Local, empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key for achieving sustainability • decentralization of decision making • community participation at all levels • women's involvement in planning process • legitimacy of livelihoods • access to information and appropriate education assured
Local, regional and national network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desertification a cross-border issue • construction of substantial information and communication networks
Global economic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the economies of the North able to cause over-exploitation of land in the South
Actions of donors and the extent of their support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that aid money reaches the grassroots level to support local activities
Institutional change at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one of the most difficult challenges • change in attitudes and policies of the centralized bureaucracies which control resource use
Political will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prerequisite for handing over decision making to local people and promoting decentralization

Table 2. Critical issues and priorities raised by the NGOs interviewed at INCD 10

issue	details
Awareness raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the CCD should be known throughout all sectors of society, in the government and NGO community • donor community should be informed of the CCD • facilitation should be provided for developing countries to mobilize necessary funds for the implementation of the CCD
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • institutional capacity • inadequate human, technical and financial resources at both governmental and community levels • understanding of bottom-up approach • lack of education among the local population
Access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • necessary for accurate (well-informed) decisions • what information? provide to whom • appropriate media for dissemination, community cost for providing information
Resources • human, technical, financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of National Action Programmes (NAP) in real partnership • serious lack of provision of funds
Enabling environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prerequisite for incorporating all stakeholders in planning and decision making process
Political will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of partnership • devolution of decision-making • acceptance of cultural changes • allocation of necessary financial resources
Involvement of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women involved in all aspects of the development of NAP • participation in decision-making • education for women • workload of women reduced • men's supportive role for women promoted

order to achieve the goals set out. At the local level, people are, first of all, busy with daily survival under difficult circumstances caused by poverty and environmental degradation. Scarce resources for survival at the local level, like fuel wood, fertile soil and stable water sources, increase the workload of women in particular. Policy makers have to keep in mind that unless social issues are not tackled, local populations will not be able to devote their limited time in favor of anti-desertification activities.

One necessary and effective way to facilitate local participation is decentralization at the national level in particular. Decentralization, in other words, the devolution of decision making and authority, *i. e.* power, should be expressed in the form of a decentralization policy of each Convention Party. It depends mainly on existing political will as regards the empowerment of local government. Decentralization is also a very important factor in strengthening local communities and should be taken into consideration when elaborating anti-desertification policies.

Table 1 and 2 are a summary of critical issues to be kept in mind. The first one shows the issues from the points of view of negotiating members of the INCD, mainly governments and international institutions, and the second summarizes the views of the NGO community. They will be used as references for special attention needed in preparation of anti-desertification policies.

3. Conclusion - There are Three Keys : Respect for the CCD, Participation and Coordination

Anti-desertification activities should not only be considered technical. Other elements play pertinent roles in their effective realization. The Convention clearly states the importance of taking action in the social sector in the fight against desertification and provides a very useful and practical framework. The CCD is the result of long and intensive negotiations on desertification among all the actors including NGOs/CBOs. It should be respected by both developing and developed country Parties and two issues in particular, "Participation" and "Coordination", should be highlighted.

As regards these two issues, there are five keywords to keep in mind. They are (1) Information, (2) Communication, (3) NAP, (4) Consultation mechanism/coordination body and (5) National Fund on Desertification (NFD).

Lack of communication leads to the distortion of planned activities and incongruence of their implementation. Insufficient sharing of both the technical and the administrative information concerned creates an unfavorable environment for the execution of projects. "Sharing" should not mean one-way provision of information in a top-down way but in an interactive way. Information should be shared in real terms, for example by holding a meeting which permits local populations to express their thinking and give input of existing local knowledge and experi-

ences to the plan of concrete activities. In addition, decentralization is indispensable for ensuring the full participation of concerned actors at all levels.

The "consultative mechanism" is a key tool of "coordination" throughout the CCD process. It can be realized through a series of meetings among all the concerned actors with local NGOs/CBOs acting as intermediaries in close collaboration with local governments at the local level. At the national level, NGOs/CBOs and local and central governments need to keep close communication and cooperation before, during and after the implementation of the planned activities. Systematic consultative opportunities should be prepared at all levels: international, regional, subregional, national and local.

It is also important that the mobilization of necessary financial resources not be left aside. That is where the donor community in particular can play a crucial and pertinent role. NFD is the key at the national level for the implementation of the NAP. Further efforts to secure funds needed to form NFD should be made along with the preparation of the NAP. The donor community needs to be more aware of this. The appropriate provision of both technical and financial support should be maintained. One estimation shows that about 9 billion US dollars per year, *i. e.* more than half the ODA which sub-sahelian countries receive, is necessary for anti-desertification activities (John Nyamu, 1999).

Anti-desertification programmes should be formed in full consideration of the CCD to assure synergism among various activities of different actors, including women, at all levels. Local participation should be

emphasized and the resources fully mobilized to maximize the effectiveness of CCD implementation. Effective anti-desertification policies have not only a technical aspect but also a social agenda which requires changes in the society as a whole. It is challenging and we all have to work together to tackle desertification.

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