

# Combating Drought and Desertification in Context of the CCD : Research Priorities and Challenges

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## Abstract

Effective combat against desertification must involve everyone concerned at national, sub-regional, regional and global levels. It must involve the states, private sector, civil society, and communities; and it must be an integral part of the overall strategy for sustainable human development. The basic socio-cultural and sustainable livelihood systems for dryland populations must be addressed first and foremost.

The Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) represents a major paradigm shift in perception of the problem of desertification, recognizing its global dimension and poverty as its underlying cause, and proposing a people-centered approach.

Activities UNDP has been undertaking in support of implementation of the CCD include initiation of National Action Programme (NAP) processes in Africa, encouraging preparatory activities in Latin America and the Caribbean, and technical backstopping and financial assistance in Central and Western Asia. The UNDP has also launched various thematic and cross-cutting initiatives in many countries and also on the global level to complement the national, sub-regional and regional action programmes.

UNDP has also recently undertaken assessment of NAP processes around the world in order to derive lessons and discover challenges and opportunities, and thus to enhance and streamline UNDP support for implementation of the CCD.

To build effective action programmes, capacity building, policy and legal reforms are essential to promote involvement of civil societies. Also essential are land tenure reviews and their impacts on natural resources management, the role of research and technology in promoting better land-use practices, and information. With the right policies and determination, poverty can be eradicated.

**Key words** : action programmes, Convention to Combat Desertification, drylands, people-centered approach, poverty, sustainable development

## 1. Introduction

Desertification is both a local as well as a global challenge. It has underlying causes in poverty affecting millions of local communities and populations. Its manifestations on the other hand go beyond national boundaries, affecting regional and international waters, global biodiversity and climate change. For this reason effective combat against desertification must involve all concerned stakeholders at national, sub-regional, regional and global levels; it must involve the states, private sector, civil society and the communities themselves; and it must be an integral part of the overall strategy for sustainable human development.

The Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or

desertification, particularly in Africa, had its origin in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It is therefore an environmental as well as a sustainable human development challenge par excellence.

The Convention was adopted in June 1994, and entered into force in December 1996. Ratification now stands at over 145 countries.

The Convention represents a major shift in paradigm in the way the problem of desertification has been perceived in the past; recognizing its global dimension and proposing a people-centered approach to combating desertification. The Convention also, for the first time recognizes Poverty as the underlying cause of desertification, impacting primarily on food security and sustainable livelihoods of populations living in world drylands. The latest estimates by UNSO and the World Resources Institute indicate that this phenomenon currently affects over 1.2 billion people globally, most of them in Africa and Asia.

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## 2. UNDP Focus

The UNDP's focus is on four main themes : poverty eradication, regeneration of the environment, governance and promotion of the role of women within the overall goal of promoting sustainable human development. The Convention to Combat Desertification, more than any other framework emanating from Rio, provides an excellent opportunity for addressing these issues in the affected dryland regions of the world. To us, effective programmes to combat desertification must address first and foremost the basic socio-cultural and sustainable livelihood systems for dryland populations. In keeping with the spirit and provisions of the Conventions, they must be people-centred and promote decentralized decision making, strong local community involvement, and policies that empower people and give them a voice in matters affecting their lives, including how resources are managed.

The Convention provides for the affected country Parties to elaborate National, Sub-regional and Regional Action Programme (NAP, SRAP and RAP) processes, as the basic frameworks through which they will combat desertification. Because of the innovative provision of the Convention, its implementation is expected to be dynamic and evolving process. It is also important to note that nature and content of the programmes will vary according to the socio-cultural, economic and institutional situation.

## 3. Implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification

Since the Convention was adopted in June 1994, UNDP through its network of over 130 country offices as well as through UNSO has been at the forefront in supporting the implementation of the Convention. Almost 50 countries have received technical and catalytic financial support from UNSO while launching and implementing these CCD programmes at the national and sub-regional levels.

### 3.1 Activities in support of implementation of the CCD

Below are highlighted some of the activities that UNDP has been undertaking in support of the implementation of the CCD :

- i . In Africa, National Action Programme processes have been initiated in 26 countries with catalytic funding and technical support from UNSO and UNDP. Several countries have held their first National Forum at which the most concerned stakeholders agree on the contents of the NAP in terms of priority programmes and projects, identify and propose funding resources and mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of the NAP, and also agree on arrangements for coordination, information exchange and technical cooperation. To further strengthen these efforts, UNSO has developed a jointly funded programme with the United

Nations Volunteers (UNV) to place nationally recruited UNVs within National Coordinating Bodies in 13 select African countries.

- ii . At the sub-regional level, UNSO collaborates with sub-regional African organizations (CILSS, IGAD, SADC and UMA) in the development of an approach to the sub-regional consultations in Southern, Northern and Western Africa were additionally provided. In the SADC region, UNSO has endorsed the establishment of a sub-regional system of information exchange, as well as a monitoring and evaluation system facilitating implementation of the CCD.
- iii . In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNSO is actively encouraging preparatory activities for implementation of the Convention in various countries in the LAC region, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru.
- iv . At the sub-regional level, UNSO is promoting the development of sub-regional programmes for sustainable dryland development in the Gran Chaco (involving Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay) and Puna programme sub-region of the Andes region, in partnership with NGOs. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, UNSO is presently supporting initial preparation for a sub-regional programme in Central America, to include Haiti and Dominican Republic.
- v . In Asia technical backstopping and financial assistance have been extended to both Central and Western Asia. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, China, India, Mongolia and Pakistan have launched dryland management programmes in an attempt to halt existing desertification trends. Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are currently working on strategies to increase participatory involvement in addressing land degradation. The most recent workshop was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, which provided interactive training to the participants in the NAP process, strengthened the launching process of the NAP, provided methodological tools to guide this process, and engaged in an information exchange among participants on bottlenecks, constraints and opportunities for the NAP process.
- vi . Similarly, UNSO has provided technical assistance to Djibouti, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen. Capacity building workshops have been organized for the countries of Western Asia, in collaboration with CEDARE, initiating a SRAP. For example, following the conclusion of the International Expert Group Meeting for the Preparation of a SRAP in Western Asia, a cost-effective institutional mechanism to advance sub-regional coopera-

tion was introduced for future development. The advancement of sub-regional cooperation by UNDP/UNSO and other interested institutions is being considered through the conceivable establishment of an office based within the Arab Region.

### 3.2 Thematic and cross-cutting initiatives

In addition to the above, various thematic and cross-cutting initiatives for dryland management have been launched by UNSO, complementing the national, sub-regional and regional action programmes.

- National Desertification Funds (NDF) : NDFs represent innovative financial mechanisms for mobilizing and channeling appropriate resources to dryland management programmes directed towards local level initiatives. These funds have been launched or are in the process of initiation in 32 countries.
- Drought Preparedness and Mitigation (DPM) : In collaboration with specific sub-regional organizations and various external partnerships, UNSO has piloted DPM projects in order to promote a timely and effective response to drought through sub-regional drought mitigation strategies. UNSO has recently launched a review assessment to best integrate drought issues in the NAP and SRAP processes.
- Environment Information Systems (EIS) : EIS development in the drylands is central in promoting local decision-making regarding strategies to regenerate the environment. UNSO has provided direct support encouraging institution building and awareness raising to China, Cape Verde, Senegal, Eritrea, Tanzania, Niger and Mali.
- Promoting Farmer Innovation in Water Management (PFI) : this is a pilot initiative on rain-fed agriculture in the dryland of Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganada. Launched in July 1997, PFI indentifies a common methodology from which to introduce innovative means for farmers in the promotion of sustainable water management.
- Patroral Development : UNSO is currently undertaking a review of pastoral modes of production in order to facilitate the advancement of knowledge pertaining to pastoral development. Incorporating these issues within the NAP and SRAP programmes is necessary in order to best integrate dryland management with affected modes of land production.
- Community-based Pilot Programmes : at the local community level, UNSO is involved with 9 pilot projects aimed at building the capacity of communities to manage small grant resources. These pilot have been launched in Eritrea, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Information emanating from these pilot projects will be used to refine and streamline the procedures and approaches for direct support to local communities in context of the overall NAP process.

### 3.3 Cross-cutting activities on global level

On the global level, UNSO has been involved in various cross-cutting activities aimed at promoting the implementation of the CCD. These include the following :

- Advocacy and Outreach : awareness raising and commitment to the implementation of the Convention, through the targeted distribution of Information Notes, advocacy kits, visuals and resource materials, the sponsoring of special events, such as World Day to Combat Desertification and the development of a knowledge-based web-site, all aimed at promoting awareness of dryland issues.
- Strengthening the Role of Women : a Gender Strategy and 12-month Plan of Action was developed in collaboration with RIOD to increase gender sensitivity and incorporate women as active participants involved in the implementation of the CCD at all levels.
- Strengthening the Participants of NGOs : partnership building with NGOs and CBOs remains a regional and socio-economic contexts. Technical and financial support strengthens NGO Networking, and the organizing of national, sub-regional, regional and global RIOD meetings.
- Networks and institutions Survery : UNSO, in collaboration with UNEP, is assisting in the development of a survey probing the existing networks and institutions that contribute to the work on desertification for the Committee on Science and Technology, as requested COPI.
- Benchmarks and Indicators : with the CCD Secretariat, OSS and others, UNSO is currently developing a matrix of indicators and a methodology to assess the implementation of the Convention to date, both accounting for reliability and validity of assessment.

Also in the context of our global responsibilities, you may already be aware that UNDP is a founding member of the Facilitation Committee of the Global Mechanism (GM), the Convention's vehicle to promote mobilization of resources to support the implementation of the Convention. The other founding members of the Committee are IFD and the World Bank, and others include four regional development banks (AfDB, Asian DB, the Islamic Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank), the CCD Secretariat and the Managing Director of the GM. The GM itself is housed in IFAD and the managing director started work in October 1998. This Mechanism is expected to become operational shortly.

## 4. Development of Key Concepts

One of the important challenges in implementing the Convention is getting right the concepts as foreseen in the Convention provisions. UNSO has been in the forefront in the development of key concepts related to the implementation of the CCD. Key concepts and related documents/publications include :

- The concept of the National Forum is now being pursued by all parties as a useful start-up mecha-

nism for partnership building, particularly in Africa, providing conceptual guidelines on the national and sub-regional action programme processes.

- Key concept papers, brochures, guidelines and other publications on how to set up and manage National Desertification Funds, include the publication *Mobilizing Resources for National Desertification Funds through Debt-for Environment Swaps*.
- Technical publications, such as *Aridity Zones and Dryland Population: Levels in the World's Drylands*, have been produced in collaboration with the World Resources Institute.
- A preliminary overview on NAP-processes, UNDP contribution to COP2 meeting in Dakar, Senegal in November/December 1998.

In undertaking the above activities, it is important to clarify that the primary responsibility for the action programmes lies with the concerned affected Parties, and UNDP/UNSO, like any other external partner has only a support role, primarily in the form of catalytic funding and technical inputs. This effort is made possible through contributions to the Trust Fund to Combat Desertification and Drought, a fund set up and managed by UNDP for the provision of dryland management services in affected countries. Those countries at the forefront of contributing through UNSO include Australia, Denmark, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, etc.

## 5. Assessment of NAP Processes

As a basis for streamlining and enhancing UNDP support of the implementation of the CCD, specifically at the national level, UNDP has recently undertaken an assessment of the NAP processes across the globe in order to derive lessons learnt, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the National Action Programme processes. The document on this assessment is "A Preliminary Overview of NAP Processes of the CCD." Some of the main issues emerging from this work are as follows :

- First are issues relating to the institutional status of the national action programme processes, particularly in terms of their integration within the national strategic planning and development processes. The main concern here is that the NAPs are seen as add-ons to (and therefore competing with) the already existing frameworks such as NEAPS and National Conservation Strategies.
- Second are issues relating to conceptual and methodological approaches. Main challenges include involvement of national stakeholder groups, particularly civil society, NGO, women and other groups and how to ensure this through empowerment and capacity building; partnership building and how to bring the external partners on board; etc.
- Third are issues relating to funding sources and mechanisms, including technical and scientific. The questions facing affected countries are: can combating desertification assume priority in national budgetary processes, ensuring greater allocation of fund-

ing for anti-desertification programmes within national budgets, given that most affected countries are also LDCs? Can the traditional development cooperation processes (used in negotiating development aid with external partners) be an effective tool for negotiating support to desertification control activities, given the many competing national priorities for developing countries? And how do we ensure that the partnership envisioned in the CCD becomes a reality in order to ensure support for implementation of the CCD?

## 6. Conclusion

It is important to remember that successful implementation of the Convention will depend not so much on the content of the action programmes but on the approaches to be adopted, and the readiness of the Parties to put in place the necessary enabling environment. The need for capacity building, policy and legal reforms to promote involvement of civil societies; land tenure reviews and their impacts on natural resources management, the role of research and technology in promoting better land-use practices; and information are all essential ingredients in effective action programmes.

### Three Thoughts Are to be Stressed in Concluding

One : the Convention, in tapping the collective experience of what has proven effective in sustainable dryland development, and codifying these in the form of a legally binding instrument, provides a unique vehicle for ensuring that development resources are used efficiently and addresses issues where they matter most, i.e., at the local level.

Two : because of its grassroots focus, the emphasis on local knowledge and values in seeking solutions, research must be linked to community needs, processes, institutions, knowledge and structures if it is to be effective. Scientists and researchers must therefore work in partnership with local communities, building upon local knowledge and priorities of the concerned populations. Piloting and extension must become an integral part of the scientific and research programmes, if they are to serve the interests of the land users and local communities.

Three : on the face of it, this Convention is about the deterioration of land resources in the world's arid and semi-arid regions. In the final analysis, however, this Convention is about the people. It is about poverty eradication, an important framework through which we can ensure food security and sustainable livelihoods for dry land populations. It must therefore be put at the centre of our concern, including in research and development for sustainable development. To this extent, the assessment of the success in implementing the Convention must move away from the traditional parameters such as soil characteristics, rate of deforestation, tons of soil taken away by floods, etc., to more people-oriented measures such as increase in house-

hold food supply, increase in household per capita income, etc.

Finally, poverty can be eradicated—we need only the right policies and considerable determination. This is

the challenge that we face in the arid and semi-arid regions of our world.

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