

## **Policies for addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) with a focus on strengthening the role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**

### *Summary*

The UNCCD is the global focal point and normative reference for DLDD issues. The aim of this paper is to further the debate on policy responsiveness by identifying some of the major challenges in the context of the UNCCD strategy for 2008-2018 (The Strategy), approved during the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) to the Convention (Madrid 2007). It does not present as such the views of the secretariat but describes some of the policies already in place and what is still missing, and makes suggestions on how to promote an enabling environment for UNCCD implementation. It addresses the lack of information and data on drought and desertification, their links with poverty reduction, a balanced ecosystem approach, governance and policy reform, gender and indigenous issues, and the role that the UNCCD and other international organizations and developed countries could play in tackling these problems. It also addresses options for overcoming the problem of limited attention given to the UNCCD in terms of its funding.

Raising the profile of the UNCCD is desirable, but has proved difficult to achieve in the past. Renewed attention should be paid to the fulfilment of obligations of country Parties. There are quite a few innovative funding sources that can certainly play a major part in addressing DLDD at the national, subregional, regional and global levels. The limited interest to date in supporting UNCCD implementation seems to be based on misconceptions. These can be changed by means of general and additional information about drought and desertification, which needs to be disseminated in future UNCCD communications.

### **I. The policy-setting dilemma**

1. Desertification is one of the critical global issues that emerged out of the Rio process in 1992. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment has recognized that DLDD cause environmental degradation to ecosystems beyond their carrying capacity, affect the sustainable livelihoods of vulnerable populations and tend to reduce their resilient capacities, thus incurring economic, environmental and social costs.

2. In the recent past, national efforts and some external cooperation in addressing such issues have been increasing, but both are still relatively limited despite the better perceived interlinkages of DLDD with poverty, natural disasters, adaptation to climate change and biodiversity loss. DLDD is already recognized as contributing to large-scale challenges such as food security, forced migrations and emerging conflicts. Some may argue that the affected countries have not “made the case” sufficiently enough to address the impacts of DLDD in their financial, fiscal and other national policy areas.

There is an intimate relationship between poverty and DLDD. Ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources, adaptation to climate change, and the reversal of deforestation, desertification and biodiversity loss are essential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Synergies, linkages and joint initiatives increasingly play a central role with the support of international institutions.

3. On the other hand, one may also argue that official development assistance (ODA) for DLDD, as the main response of developed country parties, has been neither sufficiently prioritized nor adequately addressed. Cooperation among international agencies is still channelled through parallel structures with very few resources allocated to integrated sustainable land-use and dryland ecosystem management.

4. The implementation of action under the UNCCD can maximize efficiency from the economic point of view, either public or private. The existence of the normative framework at national level is indeed essential. For instance, the right to land and to other environmental resources (water, vegetation, energy) and the related taxation and subsidies regimes have impacts on DLDD.

5. The sustainable management of land and other natural resources is an issue that pertains to all multilateral environment agreements (MEAs) and the UNCCD, but the potential for synergies became more apparent in the light of The Strategy. Some of the major challenges for ensuring national policies that will arrest and reverse DLDD require:

- (a) The identification of effective responses to overcome the challenges of DLDD
- (b) The identification of concrete policy actions to promote an enabling environment for the UNCCD, and
- (c) The identification of major cooperating partners as “champions” which include tackling DLDD as a priority for cooperation, including recommendations for accessing new market-based funding sources.

Promotion of informed decision-making for policy setting through a knowledge management system which is reliable and efficient can contribute to the facilitation of resource mobilization to tackle DLDD. It is important to identify the reasons for the lack of national policies on DLDD; what are the criteria for cooperation partners’ decisions on resource allocation? ODA generally focuses on poverty alleviation within the frameworks of the MDGs and poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) and other poverty eradication strategies; hence the need for country Parties to focus on including DLDD strategies in their overall policies by using a wide set of indicators to measure impacts of DLDD.

## **II. Awareness raising for DLDD and related funding in affected countries**

### ***Conceptual problems***

6. The concept of desertification is not clearly associated with natural resource degradation due to:

*Incomplete information and data on DLDD*

Lack of reliable data on drylands continues to be a major limitation for advocating the importance of the UNCCD as a sustainable development tool. More relationship between science and policy setting is needed.

*Bilateralism and the regional approach*

The very title of the Convention emphasizes that the challenges of drylands can be addressed regionally. Cooperating partners have shown a clear preference for assisting affected countries in a bilateral fashion instead of benefiting from the multilateral agreement. Targeted outreach is needed on this matter.

*Lack of national commitment to combat DLDD*

Few affected countries have set up clear policies, including the allocation of special budget lines and clear partnerships and policies, to combat DLDD. In addition, there is institutional confusion regarding the administrative settings and the localization of the focal points of the Rio Conventions at the national level.

### **III. Overcoming the problems identified**

7. Since the format of the UNCCD reporting guidelines will be reviewed at COP 9, it is necessary to develop a reliable and efficient knowledge management system as a systematic process for finding, selecting, organizing, distilling and presenting information in a way that improves implementation of the UNCCD globally in its articulation with other MEAs, particularly those relating to climate change and biodiversity, and at the level of the implementation annexes. This system should:

(a) Update information based on the national reports of Parties on the extent of desertification in drylands using UNCCD definitions combined with basic socio-economic data on poverty levels and on environmental vulnerabilities, such as climate variations, climate change, ecosystem integrity and propensity to natural disasters. There is an urgent need to include special data on global impact and the links among biodiversity, climate change, drought and desertification in order to promote bottom-up synergies and harmonization in implementation of the MEAs.

(b) Include updated data on drought management with clear indication of global, regional, national and local approaches, lessons learned and practical approaches.

(c) Provide a strong communication strategy in order to maintain a constant dialogue with external partners regarding information on poverty areas in drylands, the intrinsic link between poverty, land degradation, drought, and adaptation to climate change.

The harmonization and coordination of sustainable development policies is becoming more important, with the UNCCD having a clear role to play.
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8. This database information should be easily updated and user-accessible, aiming at concrete outreach action such as the provision of advice on giving priority to implementing the most urgent actions for combating desertification and drought, awareness-raising and capacity-building, improved communications, networking for cooperation and policy harmonization, and long-term resource mobilization strategies.

## **IV. An approach for arriving at key policies for UNCCD implementation**

### *Policies to attain the fourth strategic objective of The Strategy*

9. One characteristic of the design of policies for UNCCD implementation revolves around resources available, and in particular external and internal financial resources. External funding can be divided into four main groups – multinational financial institutions (MFIs), Bilateral Assistance, United Nations agencies, and foundations/organizations. Thus far, many private foundations and organizations have yet to collaborate with the UNCCD. A custom-designed package, after describing major partnership opportunities, could accompany a regularly-updated communication flow and specific targets for concrete working plans identifying timing and responsibilities.

### *Governance*

10. Major cooperating partners at country level highlight basic elements of good governance in their development strategies which could be promoted within the implementation of the MDGs that are related to the UNCCD goals.

Good governance can be promoted as a common objective of development policies. Most developed and developing countries highlight basic elements of good governance in their cooperation frameworks and/or development strategies. Collaboration with other existing programmes and initiatives focusing on sustainable development should not be neglected, and existing partnerships and partnership agreements should be strengthened and optimized.

### *Focus on mainstreaming and baseline indicators*

11. It is crucial to achieve the incorporation of national environmental strategies into overall policies and programmes with the use of a clear and wide set of indicators that include and standardize measures on DLDD, including focusing on regional cooperation and partnership building. The use and enhancement of databases already established by the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) could assist future resource mobilization efforts when such databases are managed and updated regularly. The same is true when strengthening existing partnerships and networks.

## **V. Advocated areas and programmes for policy convergence**

### **A. Regional or subregional drought and risk management programmes**

12. The development of existing links with climate change adaptation and mitigation schemes for drought preparedness and mitigation as part of the implementation of the UNCCD must be a priority. Action on drought management has already started in Central Asia and in the Northern Mediterranean.

13. Country Parties have repeatedly requested assistance in providing more information on awareness, training and technical education on regional warning systems and risk

management in drylands. For consistency, local, national and regional drought preparedness and other water-related policies must be jointly implemented.

### **B. Regional Dryland Forest Development Programme**

14. Although there are important links between land degradation and deforestation, reforestation and afforestation, these are generally recognized only within the context of climate change processes. National reports under the UNCCD have stressed the relationship between land degradation and forestry. Countries report that deforestation is a major cause of land degradation. They also report on ways of encouraging forestry activities in drylands, including mountain ecosystems, in connection with which several ways of supportive activities in resource mobilization and partnership building are being created. These successful but scattered success stories could form the basis for further development and replication through a systematic advisory process, part of the proposed integrated knowledge management system.

### **C. Harmonization of the UNCCD-specific indicators**

15. Many development programmes have worked to produce sets of indicators. A need for convergence and harmonization of different initiatives under the Committee for Science and Technology (CST) is needed through the process of national reports in order to promote improved access to information for all stakeholders, as indicated by decision 3/COP.8.

### **D. Development of a scientific dialogue on dryland management, land, soil and related matters**

16. Scientific and policy exchanges on DLDD and emerging global issues need to be given priority. Among researchers and professors at various universities and research centres, there is a declared interest in participating in scientific cooperation mechanisms, exchange and fellowship programmes and associated actions on policy setting. These could effectively lead to a strengthening demand for information exchange on UNCCD topics.

### **E. Towards a regional dryland economic programme**

17. Parties have stressed a lack of consistent assessment of the economic and financial loss resulting from DLDD and the related loss of ecosystem services. This represents one of the challenges under The Strategy, when considering the potential of the drylands for alternative income generation. Studies could be undertaken on interactions between dryland economies and the macroeconomic environment at national levels and the design of the associated economic assessment, including benchmarking for dryland development, production potential, market access and externalities, such as trade policies. The programme should also address the potentiality of innovative funding models. One example is payment for ecosystem services. The programme should also provide guiding tools on good practices for integrating dryland development into national budgets, describing successful cases. It is important to highlight the results of these economic analyses of environmental services provided by drylands to be included in the GEF land degradation projects and climate change adaptation funds.

### **F. Empowering indigenous peoples, gender and education issues**

18. A number of cooperating partners have shown particular interest in supporting indigenous people and gender-oriented actions through sustainable livelihood initiatives; documenting lessons learned and best practices in these matters is one approach to demonstrating their usefulness.

19. As the subject of the role of women and gender balance mainstreaming is important for the United Nations, this is one major strategic objective which should receive attention. Existing UNCCD national action programmes (NAPs) show that most countries are committed to promoting the role of women, but more needs to be done in establishing concrete policies and actions on how to fulfil that commitment. Education action, by showcasing success stories and guidance tools, is an intrinsic part of the empowerment process.

### **G. Development of concrete and effective cooperation**

20. The challenge of cooperation is to undertake joint activities in order to achieve the expected strategic outcomes of the different participating sustainable development instruments with enhanced cost effectiveness. The association of NAP priorities with those of the national adaptation programmes of action (NAPAs) is a required for effective synergistic action. The use of strategic entry points to promote synergies among the Rio Conventions and other development instruments has been recommended many times and should be employed under The Strategy.

### **H. Towards a resource mobilization strategy involving donors and international organizations**

21. The development of donor profiles and of an international organizations' network will create specific interest in terms of external funding for the achievement of the aims of the UNCCD.

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