

EDITORIAL

We are proud to announce



Mr Moise Akle

the launch of the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) Bulletin. Its main goal will be to help the RCU to fulfil one of its most important mandate: to support the implementation of the Convention in Africa through the promotion of regional cooperation and the spreading of best practices and lessons learnt. This first number will be mainly dedicated to present the decadal fight against Desertification and Drought of the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the main activities of the RCU.

We would like, however, to see this bulletin becoming the virtual "Elderly council" or "village assembly" of all actors involved in the implementation of the UNCCD. A forum to discuss freely and with mutual respect, just as it happens in those gathering which traditionally are crafting democracy in Africa, the best strategies to ensure the success of our combat. A platform for exchange of information, knowledge, experiences and best practices that will lead to a harmonized and efficient implementation of the Convention in Africa

We hence urge all partners to take this opportunity to contribute their articles, projects summaries, opinions and such other information which will contribute to the success of our combat.

Introducing the Regional Coordination Unit for Africa

The African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) to implement the UNCCD in Africa proposed the establishment of the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) and since December 1999 the RCU is operational graciously hosted by the African Development Bank (AFDB).

Why an RCU? Its main purpose is to facilitate the formulation, the implementation and the follow-up of the Regional Action Programme (RAP) and Subregional Action Programmes (SRAPs) to combat desertification in Africa and ensure their harmonization. Being a decentralised unit, it is also expected to better capture the needs of the recipients and hence facilitate the "bottom up approach" favoured by the UNCCD.

How does it operate? As a facilitator between the main stakeholders involved in the implementation of the RAP and SRAPs. One of the key goals of the RCU is to ensure a permanent communication and coherent collaboration among all parties involved in RAP and SRAP process in the region. This aspect is crucial to build consensus and ensure effective harmonized actions in line with the principles of the Convention as enumerated in its article 3.

What are its priorities / areas of intervention?

1. The promotion of capacity building for activities which are better implemented at regional level;
2. The support to the implementation and appropriate follow-up of the Convention at the regional level, and strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation, notably with a view to achieving greater synergy in the implementation process of the three Rio conventions
3. The spreading of best practices and lessons learnt among affected African country Parties through exchange of information, technical know-how and all relevant experiences;
4. The support to the implementation of the 6 Thematic Programme Networks (TPN) identified under the RAP.
5. The assistance to the implementation of Programme area 1 – "Combating land degradation, drought and desertification" of the Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of NEPAD.

CONTENTS

Editorial P 1
 Introducing the Regional Coordination Unit for Africa..... P 1
 One decade of combating Desertification..... P2
 Introducing the Thematic Programme Networks (TPN)..... P 3 & 4
 Calendar of events P 5

ONE DECADE OF COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

Each year on 17 June we commemorate the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. This year's celebration carried special significance as 2004 marks the tenth anniversary of the Convention's implementation.

- * 250 million people are directly affected by desertification
- * A third of the earth's land surface threatened by desertification.
- * 42 billion US\$ income losses per year
- * 135 million people at risk of being displaced

I. DESERTIFICATION : A GLOBAL PROBLEM

Desertification is not the natural expansion of existing deserts but the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas. It is a gradual process of soil productivity loss and the thinning out of the vegetative cover because of human activities and climatic variations. Over 250 million people are directly affected by desertification and a third of the earth's land surface, or over 4 billion hectares, is threatened by desertification. In addition, the livelihoods of some 1.2 billion people who depend on land for most of their needs and usually the world's poorest in over 110 countries are threatened. As a consequence of desertification, not only are the marginalized people living in drylands hit the hardest with the aggravation of poverty, worsening of the health and a lack of food security, but as they are forced to seek other means of livelihoods, conflicts and mass migration spill over to urban centers and abroad.

In fact, 135 million – the equivalent to the population of Germany and France combined - are at risk of being displaced as a consequence of desertification. Some 60 million people are expected to eventually move from the desertified areas in Sub-Saharan Africa towards northern Africa and Europe from 1997 to 2020. Long term studies on West Africa project a constant migratory flow from Sahelian regions to coastal cities, whose population is expected to grow 3.5 times the numbers in 1997 to 271 million in 2020. According to the Natural Heritage institute, there is a high correlation between migration, poverty and environmental stress.

Further, though desertification affects Africa the most, where two-thirds of the continent is desert or drylands and where a large percentage of the population is dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, it is not a problem confined to drylands in Africa but the whole world. Estimates are that in 2025, there will be considerably less arable land available worldwide than it was in 1990. The decline is expected to be two-thirds in Africa, one-third in Asia and about one-fifth in South America. The available water resources in dry zones are expected to be much lower than the global average. In 19 selected countries in the dry zones of Africa and the Far East, 1,300 cubic meters of water were available per head in 1990-. In the year 2025, only half of that – 650 cubic meters per head– are expected to be available.

Desertification is a huge drain on economic resources as well. An unpublished World Bank study suggested that the depletion of natural resources in one Sahelian country was equivalent to 20% of its annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP). At the global level, it is estimated that the annual income foregone in the areas immediately affected by desertification amounts to approximately US\$ 42 billion each year, while the annual cost of fighting land degradation is estimated at \$2.4 billion a year. The indirect economic and social costs suffered outside the affected areas, including the influx of "environmental refugees" and losses to national food production, may be much greater. Desertification also has grave natural consequences. It makes land areas flood-prone, causes soil salinisation, and results in the deterioration of the quality of water, silting of rivers, streams and reservoirs. Unsustainable irrigation practices can dry the rivers that feed large lakes; the Aral Sea and Lake Chad have both seen their shorelines shrink dramatically in this way. The world's drinking water supplies have fallen by almost two-thirds since 1950 and every year, twelve million people die as a result of water shortages or contaminated drinking water. Land degradation is also a leading source of land-based pollution for the oceans, as polluted sediment and water washes down major rivers.

2. DESERTIFICATION: CAUSES AND EFFECT OF POVERTY

Desertification is caused primarily by human activities and climate variations. In the past, drylands recovered easily their natural biological capacities following long droughts and dry periods. Under modern conditions, however, they tend to lose their biological and economic productivity quickly unless they are sustainably managed. Today drylands are being degraded by over cultivation, overgrazing, deforestation, and poor irrigation practices. Such overexploitation is generally caused by economic and social pressure, ignorance, war, and drought.

Desertification is both the cause and consequence of poverty

land for their livelihoods to overexploit the land for food, energy, housing and source of income. Past experiences have unfortunately blamed the very victims of desertification for causing it, without addressing the underlying forces that are driving them to overexploit the land. It is poverty that forces the people of the drylands to extract as much as they can from the land, and produces the imperative for short-term survival that gives them no choice but to act against their long-term interests. Therefore, any effective strategy must address poverty at its very center. It must take into account the social structures and land ownership as well as pay proper attention to education, training and communications in order to provide the fully integrated approach which alone can effectively combat desertification.

3. DESERTIFICATION, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY

Desertification is closely linked with global climate change and loss of biodiversity. Synergies are therefore being sought between the three so-called Rio conventions (Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Convention on Biodiversity (CBD)) to widen the impact of measures undertaken. It underlines the need to coordinate activities related to environment protection and natural resource management and the complementary nature of the three conventions.

4. THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

The first globally coordinated attempt to combat desertification was launched in the aftermath of the great Sahelian drought and famine of 1968-1974 in which over 200,000 people and millions of their animals died. The UN Sudano-Sahelian Office was set up in 1973, initially to assist nine drought-prone countries in West Africa, though its activities spread. Assistance was subsequently given to 22 countries south of the Sahara and north of the Equator. Around the same time, subregional organizations were set up in Africa. But due to a lack of support, both administrative and financial, attempts to efficiently tackle the problem of desertification were crippled.

Therefore in 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or so called Rio Earth Summit recommended the elaboration of a United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The Convention, the only convention stemming from a direct recommendation of the Conference's Agenda 21, was adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994

and entered into force in December 1996. It is the first and only internationally legally binding framework set up to address the problem of desertification. So far, 190 countries have either ratified or acceded to it and six sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) have been held. The Convention is based on the principles of participation, partnership and decentralization—the backbone of Good Governance. It consciously advocates a spirit of partnership as the basis upon which the states affected by desertification and donor countries should conduct their relations, unlike traditional top-down approaches that failed. The Convention requires from its

Parties to guarantee that all relevant 'actors' – local communities, women's and youth groups, NGOs, national governments, donor agencies and scientific research institutions – cooperate by way of deciding on priorities, developing long-term programmes and implementing them. It insists on full and effective participation by the affected groups in the decision-making, planning, implementing and evaluating processes of the programmes. The Convention also encourages the protection of traditional know-how that are conducive to sustainable development while also facilitating the exchange of latest data, information and technology through its Committee on Science and Technology (CST). The Convention has now reached maturity and is evolving from the preparation of national action programmes to their implementation. Assessment of the national action programmes by the Parties in 2000 and 2001 showed that the strengthening of capacities for key actors at the local level proved successful in identifying and addressing challenges linked to sustainable development. The bottom-up approach of the Convention helped strengthen relationships between governments and local communities, particularly in larger countries. It also favored the decentralized involvement of stakeholders and natural resources end users in the development process. During the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention held from 11 to 22 November 2002 in Rome, many innovative solutions were identified by country Parties. The exchange of information on best practices and their replication worldwide are expected to further propel an effective fight against desertification and strengthen South-South and North-South cooperation among countries and regions. Furthermore, work is underway between the UNCCD and other international organizations dealing with the environment and development issues such as the Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to find common grounds and avoid duplication. The implementation of the Convention, which has been hampered essentially due to lack of predictable financial resources, will be further expedited and strengthened now that the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a multi-billion dollar global environment fund, has been designated as a financial mechanism of the Convention.





Introducing Africa's Thematic Programme Networks (TPN)



The TPNs are networks of institutions and agencies linked together via an institutional focal point. Regional, subregional and national focal institutions will involve all key actors at regional, subregional and national level in the respective affected countries. Thus substantial activities of the networks will be delegated to participating institutions or agencies at various levels. Cooperation with other networks working on related issues will be sought. It should be noted that while a number of TPNs are already in place, implementation of activities is still under preparation. The launched TPNs are in the process of establishing and operationalizing their institutional arrangements, and identifying funding sources.

The RCU has a crucial role in acting as a facilitator between different networks of the region, as well as between networks working on corresponding issues in different regions, together with the institutional focal points. Further, the RCU ensures that relevant information on activities under the UNCCD at the global level, such as outcomes of the Conference of the Parties and meetings of subsidiary bodies, is distributed to the networks and reflected in their work.



TPN 1 **Integrated management of international river, lake and hydrogeological basins**

Priority activities as recommended by the launching meeting of this Thematic Programme Network (TPN 1) held in Accra, Ghana, December 2000 are as follows:

Support to regional and subregional initiatives for the promotion of pilot projects for the rational use of water resources of the international river, lake and hydrogeological basins in the framework of the implementation of existing Poverty reduction strategies (e.g. Niger river Basin, Nile river basin, Senegal river basin, Zam-

bezi river basin, Lac Chad basin etc.);

Support to regional and subregional initiatives for the mobilization of financial resources for the implementation of Action plans and Programmes for integrated management of water resources (e.g contribution to the organization of donors round tables);

Support and contribution to the "African Land and Water Initiative (ALWI)" of the World Bank and other associated institutions through the coordination of the inputs of the network members and focal point..

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TPN 2 **Promotion of agroforestry and soil conservation**

Priority activities as recommended by the launching meeting of this Thematic Programme Network (TPN 2) held in Lomé, Togo, June 2001 are as follows:

Support to regional and subregional initiatives for the promotion of domestication, processing and marketing of agroforestry products (plant species) of socio-economic interest for African countries;

Support to "African Land and Water Initiative (ALWI)" through promotion of agroforestry inputs and use of African expertise.

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TPN 3
Rational use of rangelands and promotion of fodder crops development

Priority activities as recommended by the launching meeting of this Thematic Programme Network (TPN 3) held Maseru, Lesotho, November 2001 are as follows:

Promotion of the development of appropriate technologies, practices and success stories for the improvement of the use of rangeland, fodder crops and other natural resources.

Facilitation of the establishment of user-friendly information systems such as databases on rangelands and fodder crop development to make them accessible to end-users.

Foster the development of human and technical capacity building in the area of rangeland management and fodder crop production.

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TPN4 Ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems

Recommendations and conclusions as adopted at the meeting that launched this Thematic Programme Network (TPN 4) in Tunis, Tunisia, from 8 to 10 October 2002, are as follows:

TPN4 can be considered a framework that will facilitate information flow and coordination of activities related to ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems

A synthesis and analysis of the existing information should be made available to the members of the network, in order to add value to ongoing activities in the UNCCD context

A web site needs to be set up linking with other networks and offering the possibility to exchange information. Partnerships should be promoted to the benefit of the respective partners. Building capacities at all levels is a major task of the network
 Linking with other regional initiatives is essential.

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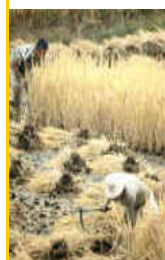
TPN5 Promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies

The TPN5 aims at promoting capacity-building and strengthening exchange of information on appropriate techniques, technical knowledge and relevant experience through the promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies. In general, the network will coordinate activities related to combating desertification through promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies from various activities undertaken by different stakeholders, in order to prevent duplication and to increase efficiency.

Launching meeting of the TPN5 has been held in Nairobi, Kenya on 5 - 6 May 2004. A detailed article on the meeting and its outcomes will be published in next publication of the bulletin.

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TPN6 Promotion of sustainable agricultural farming systems

TPN6 aims at promoting capacity-building, and strengthening exchange of information and appropriate techniques in sustainable agricultural farming systems. The launching meeting is scheduled to take place by the end of the year.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS IN AFRICA FOR 2nd SEMESTER 2004

DATE	VENUE	TITLE
1— 3 September	Nairobi, Kenya	Dryland Agroforestry workshop—Science and practice of agroforestry in the arid and semi-arid lands of eastern and central Africa (organised by ICRAF—East Africa Programme)
13—17 September	Gaborone, Botswana	Regional Workshop for Africa on synergy among the Rio conventions and other biodiversity related Conventions in implementing the programmes of work on Dry and sub-humid lands and Agricultural Biodiversity (organised by CBD secretariat)
14—16 September	Bissau, Guinea Bissau	National forum to launch the elaboration process of the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Guinea-Bissau
11— 14 October	Tunis, Tunisia	Subregional workshop on GEF's Sustainable Land management Approach for francophone african countries (organised by UNEP/GEF)
12—14 October	Niamey, Niger	Sectorial consultation on Environment and combating Desertification in Niger
1—3 November	Windhoek, Namibia	Subregional workshop on GEF's sustainable land management approach for Anglophone African countries (organized by UNEP/GEF)
22— 24 November	Tunis, Tunisia	Launching of the Thematic Programme Network (TPN6) on Sustainable Agricultural Farming System in the context of the Regional Action Programme to combat Desertification in Africa
24—28 November	Tunis, Tunisia	Forum on cooperation between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean

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