
The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Guidelines for the Revision of the National Plan of Action to Combat Desertification

Information provided by the United Nations Programme (UNEP), the Secretariat for the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), and the FAO Guidelines to implementing the CCD in the Arab Countries

Introduction

The international community has long recognized that desertification is a major economic, social and environmental problem of concern to many countries in all regions of the world. In 1977, the United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) adopted a Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD). Unfortunately, despite this and other efforts, the United Nations Environment Programme concluded in 1991 that the problem of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas has intensified, although there were “local examples of success”.

As a result, the question of how to tackle desertification was still a major concern for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environmental and Development (UNCED), which was in Rio de Janeiro. The Conference supported a new, integrated approach to the problem emphasizing action to promote sustainable development at the community level. It also called on the United Nations General Assembly to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INCD) to prepare, by June 1994, a Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. In December 1992, the General Assembly agreed by adopting Resolution 47/188.

Working to a tight schedule, the Committee completed its negotiations in five sessions. The Convention was adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994 and opened for signature there on 14-15 October 1994. Over 100 countries have signed the Convention so far, and it entered into force on 26 December 1996, 90 days after the 50th ratification was received. The Conference of the Parties (COP), which is the Convention’s supreme body hold its first session (COP-1) on 29 September – 10 October 1997 in Rome at the initiative of the Government of Italy and the FAO. The second session (COP-2) was hosted by the Government of Senegal from 30 November to 11 December 1998 in Dakar. The next session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-3) will take place in Recife (Brazil) from 15-26 November 1999.

As of 1 January 1999, the interim secretariat of the CCD officially became the Convention’s permanent secretariat. It is now based in Bonn (Germany).

Objectives

Article No. 2 of the Convention gives the following objectives:

1. The objective of the Convention is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, through effective action at all levels, supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements, in the framework of an integrated approach which is consistent with Agenda 21, with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in affected areas.
2. Achieving this objective will involve long-term integrated strategies that focus simultaneously, in affected areas, on improved productivity of land, and the rehabilitation, conservation and sustainable management of land and water resources, leading to improved living conditions, in particular at the community level.

Principles (Article 3 of the CCD)

In order to achieve the objective of the 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.

Guiding Principles/Obligations for Desertification Control Strategies

The strategy for combating desertification (FAO, 1998) should satisfy the following principles:

- Must take into account certain aspects directly related to desertification, particularly the loss of biodiversity and genetic erosion, and the important role played by dryland degradation in global climate change;
- Should be based on a model of sustainable development that considers the limits imposed by the prevailing environment; and
- Should aim at slow down or stop desertification. Such strategies should, if possible, reverse the damage already done and provide decision-making tools for the diverse situations faces.

Article 4 of the CCD stipulates the general obligations of the Parties as follows:

1. The Parties shall implement their obligations under this Convention, individually or jointly, either through existing or prospective bilateral and multilateral arrangements or a combination thereof, as appropriate, emphasizing the need to coordinate efforts and develop a coherent long-term strategy at all levels.
2. In pursuing the objective of this Convention, the Parties shall:
 - (One) adopt an integrated approach addressing the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of the processes of desertification and drought;
 - (Two) give due attention, within the relevant international and regional bodies, to the situation of affected developing country Parties with regard to international trade, marketing arrangements and debt with a view to establishing an enabling international economic environment conducive to the promotion of sustainable development;
 - (Three) integrate strategies for poverty eradication into efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought;
 - (d) promote cooperation among affected country Parties in the fields of environmental protection and the conservation of land and water resources, as they relate to desertification and drought;
 - (Four) strengthen subregional, regional and international cooperation;
 - (Five) cooperate within relevant intergovernmental organizations;

- (g) determine institutional mechanisms, if appropriate, keeping in mind the need to avoid duplication; and
 - (h) promote the use of existing bilateral and multilateral financial mechanisms and arrangements that mobilize and channel substantial financial resources to affected developing country Parties in combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought.
3. Affected developing country Parties are eligible for assistance in the implementation of the Convention.

In addition to the above-mentioned obligations pursuant to article 4, affected country Parties undertake to:

- (a) give due priority to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought, and allocate adequate resources in accordance with their circumstances and capabilities;
- (b) establish strategies and priorities, within the framework of sustainable development plans and/or policies, to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought;
- (c) address the underlying causes of desertification and pay special attention to the socio- economic factors contributing to desertification processes;
- (d) promote awareness and facilitate the participation of local populations, particularly women and youth, with the support of non-governmental organizations, in efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought; and
- (e) provide an enabling environment by strengthening, as appropriate, relevant existing legislation and, where they do not exist, enacting new laws and establishing long-term policies and action programmes.

National Action Programmes (Article 10 of the CCD)

1. The purpose of national action programmes is to identify the factors contributing to desertification and practical measures necessary to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought.
2. National action programmes shall specify the respective roles of government, local communities and land users and the resources available and needed. They shall, *inter alia*:
 - (a) incorporate long-term strategies to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought, emphasize implementation and be integrated with national policies for sustainable development;

- (b) allow for modifications to be made in response to changing circumstances and be sufficiently flexible at the local level to cope with different socio-economic, biological and geo-physical conditions;
 - (c) give particular attention to the implementation of preventive measures for lands that are not yet degraded or which are only slightly degraded;
 - (d) enhance national climatological, meteorological and hydrological capabilities and the means to provide for drought early warning;
 - (e) promote policies and strengthen institutional frameworks which develop cooperation and coordination, in a spirit of partnership, between the donor community, governments at all levels, local populations and community groups, and facilitate access by local populations to appropriate information and technology;
 - (f) provide for effective participation at the local, national and regional levels of non- governmental organizations and local populations, both women and men, particularly resource users, including farmers and pastoralists and their representative organizations, in policy planning, decision-making, and implementation and review of national action programmes; and
 - (g) require regular review of, and progress reports on, their implementation.
3. National action programmes may include, *inter alia*, some or all of the following measures to prepare for and mitigate the effects of drought:
- (a) establishment and/or strengthening, as appropriate, of early warning systems, including local and national facilities and joint systems at the subregional and regional levels, and mechanisms for assisting environmentally displaced persons;
 - (b) strengthening of drought preparedness and management, including drought contingency plans at the local, national, subregional and regional levels, which take into consideration seasonal to interannual climate predictions;
 - (c) establishment and/or strengthening, as appropriate, of food security systems, including storage and marketing facilities, particularly in rural areas;
 - (d) establishment of alternative livelihood projects that could provide incomes in drought prone areas; and
 - (e) development of sustainable irrigation programmes for both crops and livestock.
4. Taking into account the circumstances and requirements specific to each affected country Party, national action programmes include, as appropriate, *inter*

alia, measures in some or all of the following priority fields as they relate to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought in affected areas and to their populations: promotion of alternative livelihoods and improvement of national economic environments with a view to strengthening programmes aimed at the eradication of poverty and at ensuring food security; demographic dynamics; sustainable management of natural resources; sustainable agricultural practices; development and efficient use of various energy sources; institutional and legal frameworks; strengthening of capabilities for assessment and systematic observation, including hydrological and meteorological services, and capacity building, education and public awareness.

Revision of the Present National Plan of Action to Combat Desertification

As stated in the Programme Support Document (PSD) on the Environment (YEM/97/100), the Government commitment to global efforts for the protection and conservation of environment is reflected in the ratification of several international conventions related to protecting the environment (Convention on Biodiversity, Climate Change, Ozone Depletion, Oil Pollution from Ships, Combating Desertification...). These concerns are clearly documented and included in the Five-year Development Plan (1996-2000) in which the National Environment Action Plan forms the basic for the environmental chapter.

The PSD included in its Sub-programme 3 "Planning for Desertification Control" the revision and updating of the present National Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (NPACD). This revision includes the elaboration of a national conceptual and strategic framework to combat desertification as well as regional action plans focusing on areas experiencing or being threatened by desertification through beneficiary participatory approaches.

Therefore the strategy should aim at identifying the overall future direction to be followed in order to control the desertification process. It should consider and take into account the national priorities, other national strategies and national plans. Proposal for basic principles guiding the revision and updating of the NPACD can be stated as follow:

1. All actions are to be consistent with the Convention to Combat Desertification;
2. Enabling environment should be provided through the strengthening of legislation, laws and long-term policies related to desertification control;
3. Combating desertification should be given priority in the Government development plans and adequate government resources should be allocated in accordance with circumstances and capabilities;

4. Attention is be given to the development of an appropriate institutional framework, including applied research-extension-awareness raising, in order to support the processes of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of desertification control;
5. Promotion of policy frameworks and approaches which develop the spirit of partnership between government, affected populations/community groups, and NGOs in the development of regional and local plans/programmes (see attached);
6. All measures for desertification control plans and programmes should give priority directed toward (a) the well-being of peoples affected by, or vulnerable to, desertification, (b) the protection of agricultural lands affected or threatened by desertification, and (c) the protection of public, communal and private development infrastructures (roads, dams, cities, villages,....);
7. Particular attention should be given to the utilization of local experience, knowledge, expertise and traditions in the elaboration of regional/local plans and programmes;
8. Relevant national strategies and development plans should be considered in an integrated manner. Special emphasis is to be given to the following national strategies/plans (among others):
 - National Population Strategy;
 - Environmental Protection Strategy/National Action Plan for Environment and Development;
 - Agricultural Research Strategy;
 - National Water Strategy;
 - Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan;
 - Agriculture Strategy Note;
 - Aden Agenda of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation;
 - Watershed Management Strategy;
 - Natural Resource Management Strategy Note; and
 - National Strategy and Action Plans for Water Supply and Sanitation in the Pre Urban Areas.
 - YEM/97/300 Programme on Poverty....

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