

PRIMER ON CITIZEN ADVOCACY AND DESERTIFICATION



This leaflet is developed by the Global Citizens Initiative (TGCI), EarthAction and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat based on the online discussions held during the World Community Forum on Desertification from 28 February to 9 March 2012. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the TGCI, Earth Action and UNCCD.

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The following Primer is intended to help guide the efforts of citizen groups and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) interested in promoting policies and practices that help stop the spread of desertification. The Primer was developed by The Global Citizens Initiative (TGCI), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat and EarthAction. It draws on the themes discussed at the World Community Forum on Desertification held from February 28 to March 9 2012 sponsored by these three organizations, and on documents and resource materials developed by UNCCD and EarthAction.

Desertification and Its Impact

Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, commonly referred to as drylands. A certain amount of land degradation occurs everywhere but dryland ecosystems are extremely vulnerable and often give rise to unsustainable land use practices. Drylands become degraded when water, soils and vegetation are used unsustainably. Such degradation reduces crop yields, eventually renders soil infertile, and contributes to a reduction in natural resource biodiversity.

Drylands are found in over 100 countries where over 40% of the earth's population lives. 44% of the world's food production takes place in drylands, as does 50% of the world's cattle production. GDP in dryland areas is 50% lower than in non-drylands.

At least 90% of the inhabitants of drylands live in developing nations. In many cases unfavorable dryland agro-climatic conditions are exacerbated by an absence of infrastructure, uncertain [limited] access to markets, poorly adapted production techniques and an underfed and undereducated population. Dryland degradation has reduced the gross domestic product of some developing countries by as much as 48%.

Desertification is a major driver of environmentally forced migration from dryland rural areas into urban areas, and contribute to the growing incidence of cross border migration. Forced migration from dryland rural areas into cities, also is one factor contributing to social and economic uncertainties and conflicts in urban areas.

Because drylands cover so much of the world's land mass they offer the potential for carbon sequestration through increased biomass productivity. Today, 27% of the global organic carbon contained in soils is found in the drylands (UNCCD, UNEP and UNDP (2010) "Climate Change in the African Drylands").

Desertification Policy Framework

Combating desertification is essential to ensuring the long-term productivity of drylands. Some progress has been made through a number of sustainable land management practices. However in many parts of the world the problem of land degradation continues to worsen.

Against this backdrop, the 195 signatory countries, or parties, of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) work to stop and reverse land degradation by maintaining and restoring the land productivity and mitigating the effects of drought. The Convention aims to promote effective action through innovative local programmes and supportive international partnerships.

One of the most important factors affecting the success of the UNCCD is the full and committed involvement of the non-governmental community, including civil society and the community based organizations. The Convention grants an unprecedented role to civil society organizations. CSOs who work closely with local communities are strategically placed to provide the interface between governments and local populations that's needed for the development of successful UNCCD national action programmes.

As of March 2012, nearly 950 civil society organizations have been granted observer status with the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNCCD. Accreditation allows CSOs to attend all official meetings of the COP and its subsidiary bodies. It also provides CSOs with access to information, implementation about projects to combat Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD) as well as access to networking platforms both nationally and internationally.



5 Actions That Civil Society Organizations Can Do In Combating Desertification

Five actions that civil society organizations can take to contribute to efforts to combat desertification are:

- (1) become actively involved in developing, monitoring and implementing the priorities set forth in UNCCD national action programmes;
- (2) promote sustainable land management practices at the community level;
- (3) advocate for targeting zero net land degradation at the local, national regional and global levels;
- (4) strengthen the participation of women in efforts to combat desertification and to reduce the risks of droughts; and
- (5) conduct desertification outreach campaigns to raise awareness about the challenges of desertification and the need to tackle this environmental and development problem.



#1 Become involved in developing, monitoring and implementing UNCCD national action programmes

Countries affected by desertification are implementing the Convention by developing and carrying out national, subregional, and regional action programmes. Drawing on past lessons, the Convention states that these programmes must adopt a democratic, bottom-up approach. They should emphasize popular participation and the creation of an environment designed to enable and empower local people in their own efforts to stop and reverse land degradation.

Governments, national and local, have an important role to play in creating such environments. They must set up the proper anti-desertification policies and permit civil society organizations to play a strong role in preparing and implementing the UNCCD action programmes.

Action Steps: Here are several ways in which CSOs can participate in the development and implementation the national action programmes to combat desertification:'

- Study your country's national action programme and national reports, available from the UNCCD's web-site <http://www.unccd.int>
- Become engaged in national action programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes: Provide information and data on the extent of desertification in your communities
- Contribute to the reporting process on national action programme performance and impact indicators providing relevant information to the national focal point and through the reporting portal (<http://www.unccd-prais.com>)
- Implement or facilitate the community-based activities that are part of the programme

If you are a civil society organization, find out the government agency that is responsible for the development and implementation of your country's national action programme. The list of national focal points is available on the UNCCD's web-site. Contact this agency to explore how your organization can contribute to the development, implementation and monitoring of your country's action programme. Team-up with other organizations from your country to join forces and collaborate in already existing initiatives to combat desertification or contact CSO networks working at the international level.

#2 Promote sustainable land management practices at the community level

Sustainable land management (SLM) is “a combination of technologies, policies and practices that integrate land, water, biodiversity, and environmental concerns to meet rising food and fibre demands while sustaining ecosystem services and livelihoods” (World Bank, 2006).

Survival for small holder farmers in the drylands requires careful husbandry of the moisture available for crops and vigorous management of costs and revenues to minimize losses in water-scarce or low-productive years. Dryland farming has evolved as a set of techniques and management practices used to continually adapt to the presence or lack of adequate soil moisture for a given crop. Throughout the world there is a wide range of techniques that dryland farmers can use to capture and conserve soil moisture; make effective use of available nutrients; and conserve topsoil. Promising practices related to the use of land, soil, and water, and energy production include:

- Land & Soil – Soil fertility management (such as zero tillage, conservation agriculture, cross-slope barriers, forestry and agroforestry, integrated crop-livestock management, sustainable pastoralism)
- Water – Rainwater harvesting, smallholder irrigation management, terracing
- Energy – solar, wind, biogas, carbon sequestration

Action Step: All actors involved (farmers, extensionists, researchers, local population authorities and other decision-makers) need to participate in the design and implementation of sustainable land management policies and practices. Successful implementation of SLM also often requires close cooperation among neighbors or members of a village community or eco-region. Civil society organizations can help bring key stakeholder groups together to decide on sustainable land management strategies that are best suited to their regions.

If you are a civil society organization, establish relationships with key stakeholder groups in your region. Facilitate a process whereby these organizations work together (information exchange) to develop and implement options for a SLM strategy.

#3 Advocate for a target of zero net land degradation at the local, national, regional and global levels

Zero Net Land Degradation (ZNLD) can be achieved when, over a given period of time, land degradation is either avoided or offset by land restoration. This offset is preferably achieved within the same region and specific ecosystems; such that the total degraded area remains constant within the region. Zero net land degradation can occur through a combination of a reduction in current levels of land degradation with an increased effort to restore existing areas of degraded land.

Action Step: Civil Society Organizations, interested in promoting ZNLD should conduct the following community-based land usage assessment process:

- Find out the extent of land degradation in your area
- What are the causes and effect that land degradation has had on the society and the economy?
- Participate in the setting up of baselines for ZNLD in accordance with local circumstances
- Promote [foster] research on the linkages between achieving the ZNLD targets and the targets of other Rio conventions
- Make a personal commitment on behalf of your community or organization to reaching land degradation neutrality within a given and feasible timeframe
- Encourage business and political leaders to make the same commitment to zero net land degradation
- Encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships with government and private sector representatives to tackle the issue of land degradation
- Promote the use of products that are not degrading the land



4 Strengthen the participation of women in efforts to combat desertification and to reduce the effects of droughts

Women in drylands make crucial contributions in agriculture as farmers, animal husbandry, workers and entrepreneurs. Their roles vary across regions, but in every part of the world women face gender-specific constraints that reduce their productivity and limit their contributions to agricultural production, economic growth and the wellbeing of their families, communities and countries.

Closing the gender gap in agricultural yields could benefit as much as 100–150 million people (FAO, The State of the Food and Agriculture, 2011). The yield gap between men and women averages around 20–30 per cent and most research suggests that this gap is due to differences in resource use. Bringing yields on the land farmed by women up to the levels achieved by men would increase agricultural output in developing countries between 2.5 and 4 per cent. Increasing production by this amount could reduce the number of undernourished people in the world in the order of 12–17 per cent.

In depth analysis have shown that women and men have different but complementary roles in the drylands. Women traditionally have the responsibility for tending to the land and livestock, keeping them occupied outside the dwelling for most of day, and tending to household chores in the evening. Men typically handle the finances, trade in the market, and, if needed, take on outside work to generate supplemental income for their families.

The Advocacy Policy Framework (APF) on gender of the UNCCD demonstrates the benefits of mainstreaming gender in addressing action on desertification, land degradation and drought at national and local levels. The Framework, adopted in 2011, recognizes that gender mainstreaming has to take place at different levels involving multiple stakeholders. It is through the full participation of local people, and especially women, that the efforts to combat desertification can be most effective.

Action Steps: Civil Society Organizations have the ability to help ensure active participation of women in the development, implementation, and evaluation of efforts to fight against desertification. Examples of actions that CSOs can take include:

- Advocating with policy-makers and cooperation partners to improve the collection and use of gender-disaggregated data and relevant indicators in the analysis of the impact of desertification
- Promoting gender equality in relation to access to resources, opportunities for improving and diversifying livelihoods, and in participation in policy-level decision-making
- Developing incentive mechanisms that policy-makers, program planners and development partners can use to increase women's participation in the planning and implementation of desertification policies and programmes

#5 Conduct desertification education and outreach campaigns

Civil society organizations and citizens should spare no effort to make people everywhere aware of the significance of desertification and the role that the UNCCD can play in improving the quality of life for people in the drylands.

Action Steps: CSOs can develop and implement desertification education and outreach efforts targeted towards different audiences. For example:

- With policy-makers: Develop campaigns to make desertification policy makers more aware of issues affecting local communities
- With farmers: Undertake education and communication campaigns to help make farmers more aware of dryland management agricultural practices
- With women: Work with local community-based and women's organizations to increase the participation of women in desertification decision-making at the local and national level
- With students and youth groups: Develop courses and materials on desertification that can be incorporated into the curriculum of students in formal and non-formal educational settings
- With business and companies: Promote sustainable agriculture or use of techniques that do not degrade the land
- With development partners: Raise awareness of ways in which development partners can help promote the UNCCD national action programmes; and how mitigating the impact of desertification can help achieve the goals and objectives of their own programmes.

