

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection
of the Republic of Belarus

**National Report of the Republic of Belarus on
Implementation of the UN Convention to
Combat Desertification**

Minsk, 2002

Table of Contents

I	List of Abbreviations	3
II	Summary	4
Chapter III	Strategies and priorities established within the framework of sustainable development plans and/or policies	10
Chapter IV	Institutional measures taken to implement the Convention	15
Chapter V	Participatory process in support of preparation and implementation of action programs	20
Chapter VI	Consultative process in support of the preparation and implementation of the national action programs and partnership agreements with developed country Parties and other interested entities	23
Chapter VII	Measures taken or planned within the framework of national action programs, including measures to improve the economic environment, to conserve natural resources and promote their sustainable use, to improve institutional organization, to improve knowledge on desertification and its control, and to monitor and assess desertification and drought	25
Chapter VIII	Financial allocations from national budgets in support of implementation, as well as financial assistance and technical cooperation received and needed, identifying and prioritizing requirements	28
Chapter IX	Review of benchmark and indicators utilized to measure progress and an assessment thereof	29

I. List of Abbreviations

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

UNCCD – United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa

Land Committee – Committee on Land Resources, Survey and Cartography under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus

MinNature – Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus

MinAgriculture – Ministry of Agriculture and Food Supply of the Republic of Belarus

NGO – non-governmental organization

NCB – National Coordinating Body for the UNCCD

NEAP – National Action Plan for Rational Use of Natural Resources and Environment Protection in the Republic of Belarus for 2001-2005

NDAP – National Program of Action to Combat Land Degradation

NEMS – National Environmental Monitoring System

NSSD – National Strategy of Sustainable Development

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

media – mass media

CNPP – Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant

II. Summary

The Republic of Belarus is located in the central part of Europe. Its area is 207,600 sq. km, and its population is about 10 million people. The country has plain relief, and the average altitude above sea is around 160 m. These are positive prerequisites for proliferation of human dwellings and use of land for agriculture, construction of industries and highways. The geographic position of the country, its diverse natural heritage make Belarus one of the key elements of the Ecological Network of Europe (EECONET).

Over the recent decades, the country's soil cover has been affected by a number of negative processes (decreased fertility, increased water and wind erosion, chemical pollution and radioactive contamination, humus destruction, etc.). These were brought about both by natural, as well as technogenic factors.

Eroded and erosion-prone soils in Belarus cover about 4.0 million ha (19% of the territory of the country), including 2.3 million ha of arable lands. 84% of all soil-destruction processes are caused by water erosion. Deflation makes up the remaining 16%. The per capita share of agricultural lands in Belarus is about twice as much as in other European countries - 0.92 ha per person, including 0.58 ha of arable lands.

Agricultural and forested lands contaminated with radiation as a result of Chernobyl accident in April 1986 make up a special group of lands. About 70% of all radionuclides descended on Belarus. Currently, about 23% of the country's area is contaminated with radiation, including 1.3 million ha of agricultural and 1.6 million ha of forest lands. These lands present an additional risk of secondary contaminant transfer, which can be caused by soil deflation, especially intense at draughts and during fires.

One of the causes of land degradation in Belarus is the large-scale drainage campaign carried out in 1960-1980s. More than 3.4 million ha were drained, which is 16.4% of the country's area. Out of this number, about 1 million ha were wetlands, which brought about a number of negative ecological problems, such as peat mineralization, augmented land degradation, more frequent draughts and early frosts, disruptions in the hydrological regime, etc.). Especially critical was the situation in the Belarusian Polesie, where more than 40% of wetlands were drained.

Therefore, Belarus' accession to the UNCCD in 2001 is a timely action and will activate international cooperation and experience exchange in the area of land degradation, as well as stimulate investment and donor support to implementation of measures to combat land degradation and minimize the consequences of draughts on the territory of Belarus. Accession to the UNCCD will in parallel contribute to better coordination of efforts between governmental and non-governmental organizations on national, regional and local levels, in the field of awareness-raising, informing of the public, elaboration and implementation of the action program to combat land degradation.

Strategic goals, tasks, basic principles, and main priorities for development of Belarus in the first decade of the new century, have been defined in: the National Strategy of Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus passed by the Government in March 1997; the Main Directions for Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus up to 2010; and the Program of Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for 2001-2005, approved by the President of the Republic of Belarus.

The outmost priority for the Republic of Belarus is a transition to sustainable development ensuring a balanced resolution of social-economic and ecological problems on the basis of rational use of nature resources in order to meet the demands of the present and future generations.

This goal can be attained through implementation of a number of national objectives, such as maintenance of life quality and quality of environment, overcoming the economic crisis, introduction of rational nature use into industry and agriculture, elimination of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, improvement of the system of environmental education, more active involvement of the general public into environmental conservation activities, increased international cooperation in the area.

Practical activities to implement the strategic directions in the area of nature conservation for sustainable development of Belarus are listed in the National Action Plan on Rational Use of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus for 2001-2005, passed by the Government in June 2001. Alongside with priority conservation activities, this document defines organizational, economic, legal, and other mechanisms to prevent and/or reduce the negative impacts on natural environment, including on land resources. In particular, the following priority steps were defined: introduction of an integrated approach to land use planning; establishment of legal, economic, organizational and technological mechanisms for introduction of ecologically safe landscape-adaptive models of farming under changing climate and continued land degradation. Optimization of the land composition is a key element in the area of soil protection, i.e. withdrawal of low-production and ecologically unstable lands from agriculture and changing their functional role; revision of farming and amelioration methods for peat soils; compulsory anti-erosion slope protection, rehabilitation of degraded lands. In order to contribute to conservation of biological and landscape diversity in Belarus the Government is planning to increase forest plantations on those lands that can no longer be used in agriculture, as well as on low-production lands. The plan is also to expand the practice of protective forest plantations.

Establishment of new protected areas, their linking into an ecological network and its subsequent integration into the all-European ecological network is an important national objective, alongside with conservation of typical and unique landscapes, as well as operationalization of the National Red Data Book of Belarus.

The Republic of Belarus has a well-developed legal system in the area of land conservation and rational use. This is made up of the Land Code of the

Republic of Belarus (1999), Earth Riches Code (1997), Water Code (1998), Forest Code (2000), the Law of the Republic of Belarus on Legal Status of Areas which Suffered from Radioactive Contamination as a Result of Chernobyl Accident (1999), the Law of the Republic of Belarus on Special Protected Natural Areas (1994, 2000), the Law of the Republic of Belarus on State Ecological Examination (2000), the Law of the Republic of Belarus on Protection of the Ozone Layer (2001), etc. Conservation of lands and soils is listed in the national and sectoral programs, strategies and action plans (National Strategy of Sustainable Development, National Action Plan for Rational Use of Natural Resources and Environment Protection in the Republic of Belarus for 2001-2005, National Program for Conservation and Use of Drained Areas for 2000-2005, National Strategy and Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity, Strategic Action Plan for Forestry Development in 1997-2015 in the Republic of Belarus, etc.). The efficiency of their implementation is barred by limited and disproportionately allocated funding, as well as lack of coordination between various programs, strategies, action plans.

The State Program on Conservation and Rational Use of Lands, which was a key national program relevant to the implementation of the UNCCD, was limited in timeframe to 1995-2000, and as of 2002 was completed. Therefore, elaboration and implementation of a National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation will become one of the key elements of sustainable development of the Republic of Belarus. It will strengthen the efforts of national and local authorities, as well as NGOs, to combat land degradation. So far, elaboration of the Program has been fully supported by the public, authorities, and the non-governmental sector.

The Republic of Belarus became a party to the UNCCD on 27 November 2001. The Decree of the Council of Ministers of Belarus #1230 dated 16 August 2001 designates the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus as the leading state focal center coordinating implementation of the UNCCD. Scientific backup for the Convention shall be rendered by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

A regular interagency task force was established in December 2001 under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection to consider various aspects of implementation of the UNCCD in a timely and coordinated manner. The task force includes representatives of government agencies, non-governmental and scientific organizations, which are involved in various aspects related to the UNCCD.

The UNCCD obligations in Belarus will be implemented through a Plan of Activities to ensure implementation of the UNCCD in the Republic of Belarus, developed in consultations with relevant state and non-governmental agencies. Plan of Activities includes 44 paragraphs and consists of 5 sections: institutional measures; scientific support; departmental measures; information resources and monitoring; public relations. It was approved by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus. When the Plan of

Activities was discussed, all stakeholders were unanimous about the need for elaboration of a National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation, and this was reflected accordingly in the first paragraph of the Plan of Activities. By now we have already embarked on elaboration of similar regional plans.

The following measures were identified by the government and non-governmental stakeholders as priority actions to be implemented under the future National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation:

- Improvement of legislation in the area of land ownership and use, as well as in the area of land conservation;
- Elaboration and implementation of economic and financial mechanisms to stimulate rational use and conservation of land resources;
- Setting up a data bank and an information system on land degradation issues;
- Implementation of a remote control system over natural and anthropogenic factors and processes impacting land degradation;
- Elaboration of national and regional sectoral action plans for anti-erosion and forest plantation activities;
- Involvement of general public, and specifically youth NGOs and local people into initiatives to combat land degradation;
- Increasing the level of public awareness of land degradation;
- Coordination of activities under UN environmental conventions to achieve increasing synergies;
- Establishment of specialized monitoring on degraded lands;
- More active cooperation with international agencies and developed countries-Parties to the UNCCD to obtain increasing technical, methodological and financial support;
- Wide presentation of the issues in media.

The Republic of Belarus has just started elaboration of the NAP, for which a number of workshops have been planned, as well as a national forum for priority setting for NAP, and a number of other activities. Technical, methodological, and financial support to these activities from the UNCCD Secretariat, other international organizations and developed countries-Parties to the UNCCD would contribute substantially to the efficiency and pace of these activities in Belarus.

The main internal sources of funding in Belarus are national and local budgets, extra-budget funds, equity capital of enterprises and agencies, people's savings. The main external sources are loans from international agencies, bilateral loans and credit lines, direct foreign investment, transfers in the form of humanitarian aid, etc.

The key role in funding for sustainable development in Belarus is played by the state budget. In 1996-2001, environmental expenditures (including nature conservation fund) were 0.6% of GDP. At the same time the amount of resources allocated for the elimination of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster has been decreasing: in 1990 this was about 25% of the credit (expenditure) account of the

state budget, while in 1995 – 7.3%, in 2001 – 5.3%. A special “emergency tax” was introduced in 1992 specifically to collect funding for this purpose. Over the last several years, it was lowered several times: enterprises suffer from the extremely high cumulative tax deductions, which leads to their lower competitiveness, while the load of funding for recuperation of the Chernobyl-affected areas every year becomes an ever heavier burden for Belarus, which today is almost the only one to bear all of the Chernobyl costs.

The Government of Belarus attaches large importance to the international cooperation and participation of foreign partners in implementation of projects in the area of environment conservation and rational nature-use. Belarus feels high responsibility for construction of international partnerships in the field of environment conservation, particularly after the country was elected into the Board of Directors of UNEP at the 52nd Session of the UN General Assembly, for a period of 1998-2002. Belarus is a Party to 10 environmental Conventions, of which the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are most relevant to implementation of the UNCCD.

Very urgent and practically important for Belarus is the objective of ecological rehabilitation of peatlands which degraded as a result of drainage of peat soils. This can take the form of re-waterlogging of the degraded areas in order to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, restore the organic layer, conserve biological and landscape diversity.

Elaboration of the NAP will promote a closer cooperation with various international organizations and developed countries-Parties to the UNCCD, in the area of consultations, sharing of knowledge and experience on combating land degradation, as well as training of national experts in this field.

Signing of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters by Belarus has opened new prospects for wider involvement of the general public into the planning and implementation of the country's environmental policies. The non-governmental sector and local people play an extremely important role in making decisions on the process of implementation of the UNCCD.

In July 2001, after preliminary consultations with NGOs, a Public Coordination Council was established under the National Coordinating Body as a step towards implementation of the Aarhus Convention and improved coordination between the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection and the NGO sector. The Council is made up of representatives of 16 organizations, including Ecoline, Ecopravo, Ecodom, Belarusian Nature Conservation Society, Belarusian Association of Children and Youth, Belarusian Social-Ecological Union “Chernobyl”, Belarusian Ecological Green Party, etc. In March 2002, the Ministry was presented as a National Coordinating Body for the UNCCD in front of the Public Coordination Council. Ways for wider participation of NGOs in current and planned activities under the UNCCD in Belarus were discussed.

All information resources on nature use and conservation available in Belarus will be used for implementation of the UNCCD. This is more than 25 information systems, data bases and banks, as well as 10 cadasters of natural resources.

A web-site of the National Coordinating Body is planned to be established in order to better provide information to stakeholders. The site will be dedicated to land resources, their condition, on-going and planned national and regional activities, as well as investment projects and project proposals in the related fields.

Chapter III. Strategies and priorities established within the framework of sustainable development plans and/or policies

Foreword. The Republic of Belarus is located in the central part of Europe. Its area is 207,600 sq. km, and its population is about 10 million people. It borders on Poland (396 km of common border), Lithuania (504 km), Latvia (101 km), Russia (990 km) and Ukraine (975 km).

The country has plain relief, and the average altitude above sea is around 160 m. These are positive prerequisites for proliferation of human dwellings and use of land for agriculture, construction of industries and highways.

The historically developed system of urban and rural dwellings in Belarus includes 212 towns and cities and more than 24,000 rural dwellings. The average population density in Belarus is 48 people per sq. km. About 69% of the population are urban dwellers.

Belarus has a moderately continental climate with strong influence of Atlantic airflows. The natural vegetation cover of Belarus is mainly represented by forests (37.8%) and mires (5.4%). The geographic position of the country, its diverse natural heritage make Belarus one of the key elements of the Ecological Network of Europe (EECONET).

The country can be divided into 3 geophysical zones by various natural habitats and land-use functions:

- Northern zone (Belarusian Lake District) with an area above 4 million ha, is characterized by widely spread water erosion processes and high nature-conservation potential.
- Central part with an area of about 10.6 million ha, is the most economically developed, and is characterized by technogenic pollution and rapid land transformation processes.
- Southern part (Belarusian Polesie), with an area of 6.1 million ha was largely drained. It is now characterized by excessive drying out of lands, degradation of peatlands, domination of wind erosion.

Over the recent decades the soil cover of the country has been affected by a number of negative processes (decreased fertility, increased water and wind erosion, chemical pollution and radioactive contamination, humus destruction, etc.). These were brought about both by natural, as well as technogenic factors.

Agricultural lands cover more than 9.2 million ha, which is 44% of the overall area of the country, including 5.8 million ha of arable lands (28% of country's areas). The per capita share of agricultural lands in Belarus is about twice as much as in other European countries - 0.92 ha per person, including 0.58 ha of arable lands.

Eroded and erosion-prone soils in Belarus cover about 4.0 million ha (19% of the territory of the country), including 2.3 million ha of arable lands. 84% of all soil-destruction processes are caused by water erosion. Deflation makes up the remaining 16%.

Agricultural and forested lands contaminated with radionuclides as a result of Chernobyl accident in April 1986 make up a special group of lands. About 70% of all radionuclides descended on Belarus. Currently about 23% of the country are contaminated, including 1.3 million ha of agricultural and 1.6 million ha of forestlands. These lands present an additional risk of secondary contaminant transfer, which can be caused by soil deflation, especially intense at draughts and during fires.

One of the causes of land degradation in Belarus is the large-scale drainage campaign carried out in 1960-1980s. More than 3.4 million ha were drained, that is 16.4% of the country's area. Out of this number, about 1 million ha were mires, drainage of which brought about a number of negative ecological problems, such as peat mineralization, augmented land degradation, more frequent draughts and early frosts, disruptions in the hydrological regime, etc.). Especially critical was the situation in the Belarusian Polesie, where more than 40% of wetlands were drained. By now about 223,000 ha of peat soils have been completely destroyed, i.e. their peat layer has mineralized completely or does not exceed 30 cm. The degradation process continues. By 2020, the area of degraded peatlands is expected to increase by at least 10%. As a result of peat degradation, underlying rocks come up on to the surface: in Belarusian Polesie more than 92% of all underlying rocks are made up of sands.

The land degradation processes are exacerbated by the climate change that started at the end of the last century and continues up until now. The global warming brings about more frequent draughts and speeds up drying processes. Therefore accession of Belarus to the UNCCD in 2001 is a timely action and will activate international cooperation and experience exchange in the area of land degradation, as well as stimulate investment and donor support to implementation of measures to combat land degradation and minimize the consequences of draughts in Belarus. Accession to the UNCCD will in parallel contribute to better coordination of efforts between government and non-government organizations on national, regional and local levels, in the field of awareness raising, informing of the public, elaboration and implementation of the action program to combat land degradation.

Strategy and priorities. Strategic goals, tasks, basic principles, and main priorities for development of Belarus in the first decade of the new century, have been defined in: *The National Strategy of Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus*, passed by the Government in March 1997; *The Main Directions for Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus up to 2010*; and *The Program of Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for 2001-2005*, approved by the President of the Republic of Belarus.

The outmost priority for the Republic of Belarus is a transition to sustainable development ensuring a balanced resolution of social-economic and ecological problems on the basis of rational use of nature resources in order to meet the demands of the present and future generations.

This goal can be reached through implementation of a number of national objectives, such as maintenance of life quality and quality of environment, overcoming the economic crisis, introduction of rational nature use into industry and agriculture, elimination of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, improvement of the system of environmental education, more active involvement of the general public into environmental conservation activities, increased international cooperation in the area.

One of the key strategic objectives of the country in achieving sustainable development is improvement of its area organization, taking into account the macroeconomic and social policies of Belarus and using environmentally-grounded principles of physical planning, nature conservation and use. The main document guiding activities in this area is the *National Scheme of Integrated Territorial Organization of Belarus*, passed by the Government in 2000.

In the field of area planning, a priority for the country in the short and long term is a balanced functioning of local and regional dwelling communities building on integrated use of natural resources and improvement of living environment, taking into account the intensity of area development and the degree of urbanization. National Scheme of Integrated Territorial Organization of Belarus is the basic program for economic, social, and environmental development of various functional zones of the country. It builds on activities for conservation and rational use of land resources, as well as those for combating land degradation.

In accordance with the *Concept of Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus*, the economic sectors structure of the country's GDP will be adjusted by 2015 to resemble the structure of European countries: the share of industries will decrease to 28-30%; agriculture to 7.8-8.0%; construction to 5.8-5.9%. The share of the services will increase to 45%.

Achievement of long-term strategic objectives requires sufficient time for implementation of the urgent activities to improve and stabilize the national economy, which is an important prerequisite for transition to sustainable development. At all stages of social and economic development of the country, Belarus will have to overcome the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

The NSSD stipulates that economic and social development should be balanced with activities to prevent worsening of environment and achieve its stable improvement. This requires:

- Improvement of the nature-conservation legislation, the system of ecological limits and regulation of nature-use;
- Economic means to stimulate resource- and energy-saving, minimize industrial and domestic wastes, rational use of land, water, plants and other natural resources;
- State ecological examination and environmental impact assessment for all business projects;
- Elaboration and implementation of ecological audit and insurance mechanisms;

- Increased efficiency of state control, economic and administrative sanctions as a means to prevent emergency situations and ecological offences;
- Continuous account of the ecological imperative in decision making and implementation of activities to achieve sustainable development of the country.

Practical activities to implement the strategic directions in the area of nature conservation for sustainable development of Belarus are listed in the *National Action Plan on Rational Use of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus for 2001-2005*, passed by the Government in June 2001. Alongside with priority conservation activities, this document defines organizational, economic, legal, and other mechanisms to curb and/or reduce the negative impacts on natural environment, including on land resources. In particular, the following priority steps were defined by the NEAP: introduction of an integrated approach to land use planning; establishment of legal, economic, organizational and technological mechanisms for introduction of ecologically safe landscape-adaptive models of farming under changing climate and continued land degradation.

Optimization of the land composition is a key element of soil protection, i.e. withdrawal of low-production and ecologically unstable lands from agriculture and changing their functional role; revision of farming methods on ameliorated peat soils; compulsory anti-erosion slope protection, rehabilitation of degraded lands. In order to contribute to conservation of biological and landscape diversity in Belarus the Government is planning to expand forest plantations on those lands that can no longer be used in agriculture, as well as on low-production lands. It is also planned to expand the practice of protective forest plantations.

Establishment of new protected areas, their linking into an ecological network and its subsequent integration into the all-European ecological network is an important national objective, alongside with conservation of typical and unique landscapes, as well as operationalization of the National Red Data Book of Belarus (the 3rd edition of the Red Data Book is currently under preparation).

The Red Data Book of Soils in Belarus will contribute to conservation of natural diversity of soils. Currently the legal and methodological backgrounds of such a Book, as well as organizational aspects of its production and update, are being discussed. The Book will describe main types of soils that have an important ecological and scientific value for the Republic of Belarus.

The improvement of land-use efficiency is defined as one of the key objectives in combating land degradation. Efficiency here is understood as maximization of the degree of useful components in economic, ecological, social and other terms. Activities in this area are built on the following main principles:

- *Sustainability of land use and economic activities on land.* This means that any changes in the land ownership, entitlements, aims, character and forms of land use, as well as changes to the borders and areas of a specific land tract shall be well grounded.

- *Priority to rational use of lands.* This means that the main criteria for selecting the aim and character of use for a specific land tract shall not be the category of lands to which this tract currently belongs, but rather the actual benefit which can be derived from the location, ecological condition, natural, historic, technological and other values of the tract under examination.
- *Comprehensive character of land development.* This means that when making a decision about land use the decision maker shall take into account all inter-linked outcomes of functioning of various components existing in the area in question.
- *Balance between private and public interests.* This means that decision making should be public and take maximal account of the opinions of separate people and citizen groups.
- *Development of economic and legal regulating mechanisms.* The role of administrative and central state management should be gradually decreased, while the role of specific local land-users and economic entities should gradually increase.
- *Coordination between ecological and economic approaches.* This implies that well-grounded ecological criteria and norms are obligatory.
- *Close relationship between land and agriculture reforms* (with priority for land reform). This implies that carrying out of land and agriculture reforms in isolation would be inefficient.
- *Creation of a system of mechanisms for various categories of land-users stimulating rational use and combating of land degradation.*

Establishment of new forms of land use and new types of relationships between land-users is a key objective contributing to increased efficiency of land use and conservation.

The principles indicated above serve a basis for the National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation, being developed in Belarus. The NAP will be a key element of the *National Strategy of Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus*.

Chapter IV. Institutional measures taken to implement the Convention

The Republic of Belarus became a party to the UNCCD on 27 November 2001. The Decree of the Council of Ministers of Belarus #1230 dated 16 August 2001 defines the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus as the National Coordinating Body for the implementation of the UNCCD. Scientific backup for the Convention shall be rendered by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

A regular interagency task force was established in December 2001 under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus to consider various aspects of implementation of the UNCCD in a timely and coordinated manner. The task force includes representatives of government agencies, non-government and scientific organizations, which are involved in a range of activities related to the UNCCD.

In November 2001, in accordance with the President's Decree, a reform of the national-level nature-conservation authorities took place in Belarus with the purpose to increase the efficiency of nature conservation and management. The Hydrometeorological Service was attached to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, and the Ministry will from now on coordinate the hydrometeorological survey on the state level.

In March 2002, all research institutes of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences were added to the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, including institutes of soil science and agrochemistry, amelioration and meadow management, farming and foodstuffs. As a result the scientific and methodological back up for activities in the area of land conservation and rational use was streamlined and concentrated under one center.

Apart from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and its local branches, the nature conservation and rational land use activities are also coordinated (to the extent of their mandates) by:

- Ministry of Agriculture and Food Supply;
- Committee on Land Resources, Land Survey and Cartography under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus;
- Committee on Forestry under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus;
- Ministry of Architecture and Construction;
- Ministry of Education;
- Ministry of Emergencies;
- Committee on the Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus
- National Academy of Sciences of Belarus;
- Regional Executive Councils;
- Non-government organizations.

Fifteen specialized state scientific and research institute and survey agencies are involved in survey of environmental resources, preparation of scientific back up for various issues related to land degradation, minimization of the consequences of droughts, conservation of landscape and biological diversity.

Practical activities related to the Convention, are carried out by:

– local authorities and their structural branches (identification and recording of degraded lands, state control over use and conservation of lands, control and commissioning of nature-conservation sites);

– survey and project institutes (Belgiprozem, Belgiprovodkhoz, Polesiegiprovodkhoz, Belgosles, etc.): these carry out identification and survey of degraded lands and soils, prepare engineering projects for nature conservation activities;

– commercial enterprises (peat mining enterprises, enterprises of the Belmeliovodkhoz Concern, forestry enterprises, road-construction enterprises, etc.): these implement specific projects in the area of land organization and conservation;

– various land-users (are responsible for rational use of lands; can be subcontracted for implementation of various projects in the area of land organization and conservation).

Upon accession to the UNCCD, Belarus started to actively involve non-government organizations, scientists, media, various citizen groups, and especially youth groups, to the process of combating land degradation.

All of the above named stakeholders, as well as general public, are involved in consultations to develop a National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation.

All information sources on nature use and conservation available in Belarus will be used for implementation of the UNCCD. This is more than 25 information systems, data bases and banks, as well as 10 cadasters of natural resources, including: data bank of NEMS, including 4 data bases on land monitoring (such as land-use distribution, agro-soil component, technogenic pollution component, drained tracts); data bases of Hydrometeorological Service; Wastes data base; State Land Cadaster; State Water Cadaster; State Cadaster of Peat Resources; State Forest Cadaster, etc.

The techniques for establishment and maintenance of various databases and data banks on natural resources differ for various resources and in some cases do not meet modern standards. An automatic information resource management system of the Republic of Belarus, is currently under elaboration.

Legislation. The key legal instrument regulating land use issues and setting priorities for rational use and conservation of lands in Belarus is *Land Code of the Republic of Belarus* (1999). It defines:

- Goals and objectives for land conservation as related to legal, organizational, economic and other measures in the area of rational land use, prevention of ungrounded withdrawal of lands from agriculture, protection from harmful

human activities, as well as measures to increase the fertility of soils and production capacity of forestry lands;

- Scope and procedures for land conservation, including: rational area organization; rehabilitation of soils and increasing their fertility and other valuable characteristics; protection of lands from water and wind erosion, inundation, waterlogging, salination, droughts, compaction, industrial pollution, chemical and radioactive contamination, protection from other destructive processes; measures for conservation of peat soils when these are staying out of use, prevention of peat mineralization; conservation of degraded agricultural lands in case it is impossible to restore the agricultural fertility of soils; recultivation of disturbed lands, measures to increase their fertility; removal, use and conservation of the fertile soil layer when carrying out activities which can bring about destruction of soil cover, etc.

The Land Code of the Republic of Belarus defines the responsibilities of land-users, land-possessing entities and land-owners relating to measures in the area of land conservation, prevention or reduction of harmful impact on lands, competence of authorities in changing the functional role of lands and type of use, state control over use and conservation of lands. The Code provides for opportunities to use economic mechanisms to stimulate land conservation. It defines the liability for breaches of land legislation, including, among other things, norms for compensation of damage done as a result of such a breach.

The Land Code provides for conducting *land monitoring* as a system of survey and control over the condition of lands for timely identification, assessment, prevention and elimination of possible negative processes. The Code identifies what sites and objects are subject to monitoring. It stipulates the content of State Land Cadaster and defines land inventory as a set of activities regulating and improving land ownership and use relations, increasing the efficiency of use and conservation of lands, preserving and improving the natural environment.

The Law of the Republic of Belarus *On Legal Status of Areas Contaminated with Radiation as a Result of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Accident* defines such notions as: radiation-caused ecological emergency; radioactively contaminated areas; radioactively risky lands; alienated lands; lands of limited economic activities, etc. Depending on the degree of soil contamination with radionuclides and the impact of radiation on humans, such lands are subject to various limitations in terms of their economic use; otherwise they can be withdrawn from economy.

Additionally, the environmental legislation effective in Belarus includes international agreements, which the country is a Party to. The Republic of Belarus is a Party to a number of international environmental agreements and protocols. The compulsory character of these environmental conventions is stipulated by Article 56 of the Law of the Republic of Belarus *On Environmental Protection*: it says that in cases where international conventions, which Belarus is a Party to,

define certain rules which are different from the rules established by national laws, the international rules shall prevail.

Pieces of legislation regulating legal relations in the area of use and conservation of natural resources comprise a number of norms related to land conservation.

For example, the *Earth Riches Code of the Republic of Belarus* obligates users of earth riches to restore those land tracts, which were used for mining into a state suitable for their subsequent use. It also defines liability for breaches of this clause.

The *Water Code of the Republic of Belarus* (1998) prohibits commissioning of any facilities before a number of certain activities has been undertaken, including those preventing floods, waterlogging, salination, soil erosion. The Code obligates water users to take measures to prevent harmful effects of floods, waterlogging, land salination, soil erosion, formation of ravines, landslides, etc. The Code provides for liability for breaches of water-conservation regime on watersheds resulting in soil erosion and other negative processes.

The Forest Code of the Republic of Belarus (2000) contains norms obligating forest-users to improve land fertility, prevent water and wind erosion of soil, waterlogging, salination and other negative processes.

Legislation on protection of atmosphere has been developed rapidly over the last several years. It includes the Law of the Republic of Belarus *On Protection of Atmospheric Air* (1997), The Law of the Republic of Belarus *On Hydrometeorological Activities* (1999), The Law of the Republic of Belarus *On Protection of the Ozone Layer* (2001).

It is important to note, that a number of legislative acts are too general and have no direct effect. This causes the Government, ministries and other agencies to develop regulations for their clarification. Definitions in a number of acts (particularly, parts of land legislation) need to be refined. A number of legal acts have not been worked into specific regulations at all. Many of such acts are outdated and do not meet modern requirements.

Up to now there is no specific legal act regulating relations and the order for planning of land-use (physical planning). Furthermore, there is a great need in a special document (a legal act) for optimization of agricultural land-use that would create additional stimuli for intensified and more efficient agriculture on the best agricultural lands on the one hand, and provide for different forms of use of those lands that have low production capacity for agriculture.

Relevant legislation acts need to be reviewed as to setting priorities in rehabilitation of disturbed lands (the objectives should in the first place be nature-conservation, recreation, and forestry).

A special group of legal acts defines the mandates of state authorities in the area of rational use and conservation of lands.

In accordance with the Provision on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, this Ministry coordinates

activities of national authorities, local executive authorities and organizations in prevention of land degradation and pollution.

In accordance with the Provision on the Committee on Land Resources, Survey and Cartography under the Council of Minister of the Republic of Belarus, the Committee is in charge of elaboration of priorities of state policy in the area of conservation and rational use of land. It also carries out the necessary scientific and technical activities, effects state control over the use and conservation of land, arranges for measures for efficient land use. The Committee arranges for land inventory projects, carries out land monitoring, maintains state land cadaster and the single national data bank on land resources.

Chapter V. Participatory process in support of preparation and implementation of action programs

The national workshop on raising the public awareness of the need to combat desertification, held in Minsk in October 1997 with the support of the UNCCD Secretariat, was an important step towards more active involvement of people in activities to combat desertification.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus (National Coordinating Body for the UNCCD) carries out regular work in this field. The Ministry has a special department, Department of Information, which provides regular information to media and non-government organizations on all activities and projects in the area of environment conservation, including those related to implementation of international environmental agreements.

Main information on the state of natural environment is published annually by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus in an environmental bulletin called *State of Natural Environment in Belarus*, as well in bulletin *Natural Resources*. Another source of information is the annual statistical booklet called *Environment and Natural Resources of the Republic of Belarus* published annually by the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis. Materials on the ongoing changes in the environment, including land resources, are published annually in the collection of monitoring reports of Belarus, as well as in the bulleting of Land Committee called *Land of Belarus*, scientific and popular magazine *Native nature*. Every month *Belaia Rus youth NGO* publishes a scientific and popular bulleting called *Green News* which is disseminated at schools, higher educational establishments, NGOs. Information on the environment of Belarus is presented in the Internet at www.president.gov.by. Free access to this site warrants success in obtaining of environmental information by all interested. However, the site is not optimized in terms of information presentation and is updated very seldom. Therefore, it would be expedient to develop a special internet site on conservation and rational use of land resources of Belarus, combating land degradation and implementation of the UNCCD. It is worth mentioning, that access of the National Focal Point on the UNCCD to the Internet and electronic mail is limited, and this substantially reduced the efficiency of information exchange.

The UNCCD attaches significant importance to the participation of non-government organizations in implementation of its main provisions on the local level. Success of convention implementation depends largely on how strong is the feedback from the local community on land degradation issues, as well as on how well-thought the awareness raising campaign is. This requires a streamlined system of actions. Elaboration of the National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation will build on wide use of the bottom up approach, with active involvement of local people to decision making. The involvement of the general

public will take the form of informing people and specific land-users on planned activities to combat land degradation through workshops, roundtables, media articles and reports, production of booklets and other printed media.

Signing of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters by Belarus has opened new prospects for wider involvement of the general public into planning and implementing the environmental policies of the country.

In July 2001, after preliminary consultations with NGOs, a Public Coordination Council was established under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection as a step towards implementation of the Aarhus Convention and improved coordination between the Ministry and the NGO sector. The Council includes representatives of 16 organizations, including Ecoline, Ecopravo, Ecodom, Belarusian Nature Conservation Society, Belarusian Association of Children and Youth, Belarusian Social-Ecological Union "Chernobyl", Belarusian Ecological Green Party, etc. In March 2002, the Ministry was presented as a National Coordinating Body for the UNCCD in front of the Public Coordination Council. Ways for wider participation of NGOs in current and planned actions under the UNCCD in Belarus were discussed.

In 2002, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection in cooperation with other relevant ministries and agencies and with support from non-government organizations, has developed the Plan of Activities for Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in 2002-2005. The plan was passed by the Council of Minister of the Republic of Belarus. It envisages wide involvement and participation of non-government organizations and general public in elaboration of coordinated decisions on nature-use, ecological education and upbringing.

One of the key ways of effective involvement of youth into environmental decision making is their participation in the NGO movement, creation of advisory committees with participation of youth organizations. Forty-seven national youth NGOs, 11 international youth NGOs, 10 national children public unions, and 12 Youth Foundations are registered in Belarus. Youth NGOs make up only 4.4% of the total amount of NGOs in the country, which is a disproportionate presentation of the share of young people in the overall population of Belarus. Involvement of NGOs, and especially youth NGOs, should be given high priority in activities on NAP elaboration.

The main form of cooperation of all stakeholders is the elaboration of a NAP, consultations, information exchange at the stage of identification of national and local priorities, participation in training workshops, media articles, organization of other joint activities.

The UNCCD obligations in Belarus will be implemented through a Plan of Activities to ensure implementation of the UNCCD in the Republic of Belarus, developed in consultations with relevant state and non-government agencies. The Plan of Activities was approved by the Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus. When the Plan of Activities

was discussed, all stakeholders were unanimous about the need for elaboration of a National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation, and this was reflected accordingly in the first paragraph on the Plan of Activities (see Attachment).

The Republic of Belarus has just started elaboration of the NAP, for which a number of workshops have been planned, as well as a national forum for priority setting, and a number of other activities. Technical, methodological, and financial support to these activities from the UNCCD Secretariat, other international organizations and developed country Parties to the UNCCD would contribute substantially to the efficiency and pace of these activities in Belarus.

Chapter VI. Consultative process in support of the preparation and implementation of the national action programs and partnership agreements with developed country Parties and other interested entities

The Government of the Republic of Belarus attaches big importance to international cooperation and participation of international partners in implementation of environmental projects and initiatives for rational nature use. The National Strategy of Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus defines this as a priority. The National Report of the Republic of Belarus on Progress in Implementation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, prepared in 2002 to be presented at the World Summit dedicated to Agenda 21, reflects the continued commitment of the government's policy to this principle, including areas of land conservation and rational use.

Belarus has been actively contributing to the construction of international partnerships in the field of environment conservation, specifically after the country was elected into the Board of Directors of UNEP at the 52 Session of the UN General Assembly, for a period of 1998-2002.

The Republic of Belarus keeps regular contact with many international organizations working in the area of environment and rational nature use, such as United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), United National Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank (WB), Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Tacis Program of the European Union, Interstate Ecological Council, Convention and Protocol Secretariats. Belarus has a well elaborated strategy for development and strengthening of bilateral cooperation in the area of environment, first of all with the CIS countries, as well as countries bordering on Belarus and countries – potential donors (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, etc.).

The 1996-1999 cooperation with Switzerland on Land Cadaster compilation and maintenance was a big success. The project helped develop a basis for a GIS to enable digital mapping, electronic processing of data on lands, technical training of staff. Cooperation with the Swedish Land Service to improve land resource management in Belarus has also been quite successful.

Currently, a number of projects are being implemented in Belarus with financial support from the World Bank (*Institutional Development Program in the Area of Nature Conservation in the Republic of Belarus, Preparation of the First National Communication in Response to Belarus' Commitments under the UNFCCC – a GEF project*), UNEP (*Clearing House Mechanisms for Biodiversity Convention – a GEF project*), UNDP (*Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity in the Pripyat River Floodplains through Wetlands Management and Protection of Key Sites – a GEF project*), Tacis Program (*Water Management in*

the Western Dvina River Basin, Decreasing Pollution of Water Resources in the Neman River).

International cooperation in combating land degradation in Belarus is only starting to develop. Good coordination with relevant ministries, local authorities, NGOs, as well as donor community, facilitates the Ministry's work in preparation of a number of project proposals dealing with land conservation and rehabilitation of degraded lands. The highest priority is attached to concrete actions on renaturalization of disturbed lands, their ecological rehabilitation, alleviation of social impacts of the land degradation processes, development of information resources, monitoring systems. International cooperation to carry out projects on renaturalization of extracted peat deposits and degraded peat soils will contribute significantly to implementation of the UNFCCC, the Biodiversity Convention, the UNCCD, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Currently activities under the UNCCD in Belarus are guided by the Plan of Activities to ensure implementation of the UNCCD in the Republic of Belarus (see Attachment). Its full and timely implementation will become possible with financial and expert support from international organizations and developed countries-Parties to the UNCCD.

In order to better provide information to stakeholders a web-site of the NCB is planned to be established. The site will be dedicated to land resources, their condition, on-going and planned national and regional activities, as well as investment projects and project proposals in the related fields.

Elaboration of the NAP will stimulate a closer cooperation with various international organizations and developed countries-Parties to the UNCCD, in the area of consultations, sharing of knowledge and experience on combating land degradation, as well as training of national experts in this field.

Chapter VII. Measures taken or planned within the framework of national action programs, including measures to improve the economic environment, to conserve natural resources and promote their sustainable use, to improve institutional organization, to improve knowledge on desertification and its control, and to monitor and assess desertification and drought

Most activities in the area of land and soil protection, as well as prevention of their degradation, are implemented in the framework of national and sectoral programs coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Supply, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Committee on Land Resources, Survey and Cartography under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, Committee on Forestry under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus. These programs include a wide range of activities meant to increase the efficiency of land use, raise the organic and nutrient content of soils, regulate water regime, decrease the negative impact of degradation processes.

A milestone in activities to preserve land fertility and ecological value of lands was the State Program *Conservation and Rational Use of Lands* passed by the Government of Belarus in November 1994. The program covered a five-year period (1995-2000) and comprised a thorough analysis of the modern state of lands, as well as a set of new elements related to the use of information technologies and outcomes of systemic monitoring. Efficient use of drained peat soils, activities to prevent erosion and destruction of the peat layer, recultivation of lands – all these were central issues covered by the Program. Unfortunately, the difficult economic situation in the country prevented this important Program from being completed to full extent.

For Belarus degradation of lands is closely related to the negative consequences of wide-scale land drainage and the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant accident.

Drainage was especially intensive in 1960-80s of last century. The recent economic and social developments have necessitated a new conceptual approach to dealing with drainage issues and land use in each specific district, locality, at each specific enterprise. The new approach has to create favorable conditions for work and living of people in rural areas. In order to provide for such a new approach, the Government of Belarus in January 2000 passed State Program *Conservation and Use of Drained Areas in 2000-2005*. The Program accentuates the need to preserve the drained areas as a national heritage of Belarus. At the same time, the strategy should be to reconstruct the existing drainage facilities, rather than build new ones. The Program contains clearly classified types of use of drained areas prescribed per soil texture, water regime, structure of the soil cover, aerial distribution of drainage facilities. Prevention of land degradation is defined as a priority for all managing administrative and managing authorities.

However, under current limited investment opportunities, the requirements of the Government have not been fully observed, and this results in expansion of

degraded lands. Peatland degradation is sped up by the ungrounded specialization of agricultural enterprises, unwise distribution of crop plantations, non-implementation of anti-erosion measures, irrational regulation of the water regime, lack of efficient control over the use and conservation of lands.

The *Program of Engineering Measures to Protect Dwellings and Agricultural Lands from Floods in the Polesie Region, for 1999-2004* passed by the Government in July 1998, has importance for conservation of floodplain areas of the country. The Program was elaborated in response to catastrophic floods observed in some years in the past, resulting in inundation of vast inhabited areas of Polesie and enormous damage to various economic entities, in the first place to agriculture.

Funding of the above named programs has been irregular over the last several years. This diminishes their efficiency and impacts on the outcome. Recultivation of land has also been severely under-financed recently, reducing the scope and scale of activities in this field.

In 1993, the Government passed a decision establishing a National Environmental Monitoring System with the purpose to obtain objective information on the condition of environment and ensure supply of environmental information to all levels of state authorities, economic entities, and public. The system operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection and the Interagency Coordinating Council on Monitoring. The Council includes representatives of state authorities, leading scientists and representatives of the non-governmental sector. The NEMS carries out 13 types of monitoring of various components of the environment, including land and soil monitoring (which in turn includes monitoring of land funds, agro-soil monitoring, monitoring of drainage facilities, monitoring of technogenically polluted soils). Data from all monitoring is stored in the special data bank of NEMS. Main observation outcomes are published annually in a bulletin that is freely available to everyone.

The main instrument in dealing with issues of rehabilitation of radioactively contaminated lands and implementation of measures to reduce radiation doses of population through clean agricultural and forestry products is *the State Program of the Republic of Belarus to Overcome the Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Accident, for 2001-2005 and up to 2010*, passed by the Government of Belarus in 2001. The Program has the following priority objectives: decrease the dose loads on the population; production of clean agricultural products; protective and rehabilitation activities on the most contaminated areas in order to prevent secondary contaminant transfer as a result of wind and water erosion as well as forest fires; establishment of a network of radiological control and monitoring; production of modern tools for measuring the radioactive contamination of soil.

A range of environmental issues related to the conservation and rational use of land resources are addressed in the *National Strategy and Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity*.

The *State Program on Conservation and Rational Use of Lands*, which was a key national program relevant to implementation of the UNCCD, was limited in time by 1995-2000, and as of 2002 was completed. Therefore, elaboration of a National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation will become one of the key elements of sustainable development of the Republic of Belarus. It will strengthen efforts of national and local authorities, as well as NGOs. So far, elaboration of the NAP has been fully supported by the public, authorities, and the non-government sector.

International cooperation plays a very important role in resolving the issues of land degradation. Belarus is a Party to a number of environmental agreements and protocols, of which the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are most relevant to implementation of the UNCCD. Elaboration and implementation of the National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation will certainly be coordinated with the National Strategy and Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity (adopted 1997), as well as with National Strategy on Climate Change, currently under elaboration.

The following measures were identified by the government and non-government stakeholders as priority actions to be implemented under the future National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation:

- Improvement of legislation in the area of land ownership and use, as well as in the area of land conservation;
- Elaboration and implementation of economic and financial mechanisms to stimulate rational use and conservation of land resources;
- Setting up a data bank and an information system on land degradation issues;
- Implementation of remote control methods over natural and anthropogenic factors and processes impacting land condition and degradation;
- Elaboration of national and regional sectoral action plans for anti-erosion and forest plantation activities;
- Involvement of general public, and specifically NGOs and local people into initiatives for combating land degradation;
- Increasing the level of awareness of the land degradation issues and combating means among the general public;
- Coordination of activities under UN environmental conventions to achieve increasing synergies;
- Establishment of specialized monitoring on degraded lands;
- More active cooperation with international agencies to obtain increasing technical, methodological and financial support;
- Wide presentation of the land degradation issues in media.

Chapter VIII. Financial allocations from national budgets in support of implementation, as well as financial assistance and technical cooperation received and needed, identifying and prioritizing requirements

Reaching sustainable development is hardly possible without adequate financial resources, efficient mechanisms for their accumulation and disbursement.

The main internal sources of funding in Belarus are national and local budgets, extra-budget funds, equity capital of enterprises and agencies, people's savings. The main external sources are loans from international agencies, bilateral *loans and credit lines, direct foreign investment, transfers in the form of humanitarian aid, etc.

According to the Land Code of the Republic of Belarus and the Law of the Republic of Belarus on Environmental Protection, activities to combat land degradation, as well as other nature-conservation activities, can be funded from the following sources:

- National and local budgets;
- Nature Conservation Funds;
- Own funds of nature-users;
- Funds of losses incurred by agricultural and forestry enterprises as a result of changing the type of usage of agricultural and forestry lands;
- Voluntary contributions and donations from organizations and people;
- Bank loans;
- Other funding sources of the Republic of Belarus that are not prohibited by the legislation of Belarus.

The key role in funding for sustainable development in Belarus is played by the state budget. In 1996-2001 environmental expenditure (including nature conservation fund) were 0.6% of GDP. At the same time the amount of resources allocated for the elimination of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster has been decreasing: in 1990 this accounted for about 25% of the state budget expenditures, while in 1995 – 7.3%, in 2001 – 5.3%. A special “emergency tax” was introduced in 1992 specifically to collect funding for this purpose. Over the last several years it was dropped several times: enterprises suffer from the extremely high cumulative tax deductions which leads to their lower competitiveness, while the load of funding for recuperation of the Chernobyl-affected areas every year becomes a still heavier burden for Belarus, which today is almost the only one to bear all of the Chernobyl costs.

Foreign investment in environmental protection is very limited and is mainly directed to resolving issues related to biodiversity conservation and prevention of ozone depletion.

Very urgent and practically important for Belarus is the objective of ecological rehabilitation of peatlands that degraded as a result of drainage of peat soils. This can take the form of re-waterlogging of the degraded areas in order to

decrease greenhouse gas emissions, reinstall the organic layer, conserve biological and landscape diversity.

Chapter IX. Review of benchmark and indicators utilized to measure progress and an assessment thereof

Definitions. *Land degradation* and *degraded lands* are not clearly defined in the Belarusian legislation. Their use in legal, procedural, and technical texts is infrequent. More frequently, documents of this kind talk of various land types (depending on the character of use, e.g. disturbed lands); their qualitative condition (e.g. eroded lands or lands with various degree of pollution); types of negative impacts and processes (inundation, soil erosion, etc.). Scientific sources do not give clear definitions either.

Classification and records. There is no commonly acceptable classification of degraded lands in Belarus. There exist several sectoral classifications (and their scientific basis), as well as a number of different systems of recording (inventorizing) one or several types of degraded lands and soils (used by various land-inventorizing agencies, drainage, peat-extracting, scientific and other enterprises).

The State Land Inventory building on the scheme of land-use, distribution of various land categories and administrative division, defines areas of the following lands:

- disturbed lands (lands which have lost their initial economic, social and environmental value as a result of anthropogenic impacts), including lands disturbed as a result of mining, peat extraction, construction and other works. Disturbed lands are the ones which have lost their economic value, or those that are considered a source of negative impact on the surrounding environment as a result of disturbed soil cover, changes in the hydrological regime, formation of technogenic relief (following human economic activities);

- other lands (land tracts that are not used for economic, social and environmental purposes), including:

- a) sands without vegetation;

- b) ravines (land plots of erosion origin with linear relief forms deeper than 1 m, with lacking of very poor soil cover, with rocks or underlying soil horizons protruding to the surface on slopes);

- c) burned out peatlands (peat lands which have suffered from fires up to the degree when no vegetation develops);

d) former agricultural lands, contaminated with radionuclides (lands located in the radioactively contaminated zones that are not used in the national economy for production of foodstuffs meeting national norms and standards).

Currently there is no state register of lands based on their qualitative condition (e.g. level of erosion, pollution, disturbance degree as a result of construction works, etc.).

Collection of data. Data on the area of various land types, as well as on their distribution, is collected by land-planning branches of local executive committees and those of the Committee on Land Resources. Information about land resources on the districts, regional and city level is also provided by a number of other relevant agencies (e.g. forestries present data on state forest fund). Re-calculation of the land fund balance is made on the basis of various investigations, survey and engineering projects undertaken by enterprises and organizations of various state authorities (most of these data comes through the Committee on Land Resources), as well as non-state enterprises and entrepreneurs. Implementation of many of these projects and surveys is monopolized by the state; a big part of them is subject to licensing. As a rule, most of the above projects and surveys are built on a thorough legal, procedural, and technological basis, which in turn build on sound and coordinated scientific and methodological approaches.

Methods and scientific procedures for collection of data on the qualitative state of lands limiting their economic utilization without changing its purpose, are least developed. Very often narrow administrative interests and subjectivity of analysis prevail in such situations. The consumer of this kind of information in most cases has no clear picture of what he or she wants to obtain. A relatively good methodological, procedural, technological, and technical basis exists for works on identification of eroded and radioactively contaminated lands. The procedures for other types of pollution are least developed. (For example, some types of land pollution in Belarus have even not been completely mapped). Technique assessments of the condition of those lands that are under several negative impacts at the same time have been poorly developed.

Compilation of engineering projects for nature-conservation activities. Forecasting, programming, and project documentation for physical planning (including in that part which relates to nature-conservation) on the level of districts and other separate administrative units has become outdated and, as a rule, is not being actualized. Thereby, all changes to the type, character and intensity of land-use per each specific land plot, need to go through a complex procedure of consideration, agreement and approval. Having said this, an integrated approach to the use of land resources and development of the area is still lacking in many instances. There is a need to develop new scientific and methodological approaches to physical planning in light of modern standards and requirements and building on a balance of ecological and economic interests, the need to conserve biological and landscape diversity, and forecast climate changes.

As a rule, technologies of rehabilitation of degraded lands using various methods (recultivation, anti-erosion and hydrotechnical measures, protective forest planting, etc.) are well developed per each concrete site with its concrete purpose of rehabilitation. Methodological, normative and technical documents for elaboration of engineering projects to return degraded lands back into intensive agricultural use have been developed much better and more complete than the methodological, normative, and technical documents for rehabilitation of lands with the purpose of their nature-conservation and/or recreational use.