

## **SUMMARY OF BENIN THIRD NATIONAL REPORT ON THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION**

Benin Republic presented its third national report on the United Nations' convention to combat desertification. This report aims not only at appraising how far programs and projects have contributed to slower deserts overhang but also at examining the improvements linked to this convention's implementation up to February, 2004. It includes four main points which are the following : (i) the global diagnosis, (ii) the measures taken to implement the convention, (iii) the critical analysis of this implementation and (iv) the conclusion and recommendations

### **I°/ Global diagnosis**

The global diagnosis deals with the administrative structure in charge of running the National Program to combat desertification, the progress made by this program, the government parties as well as the Non Governmental Organisation involved in the program.

The remaining part of the diagnosis evolved around the process of consultation and the consultative meetings as well as the specific bills passed by the Executive to accompany fight against desertification. In fact, the National Program to combat Desertification is under the control of the Department of Environment of the Ministry of Environment. The charts 1 to 6 of the report deal with the National Program achievements. The convention has been ratified in 1996 by the country and integrated into many main development plans of the government.

The ratification of the convention in 1996 has been the first step of its implementation in Benin. To prove the political will of the government, the National Plan to combat desertification has been adopted and launched. The first acts testifying the implementation of this National Plan are the following:

- Creation of the National Commission to Combat desertification in 1997,
- Promulgation of the bill concerning the rules and regulation of environment in 1999.

Moreover, about fifteen acts have been adopted and promulgated.

The National Commission to Combat Desertification as far as the stakeholders or partners of the convention are concerned, includes both international institutions dealing with environmental issues and state ministries somehow involved in the field of environment. As such, eleven ministries are involved: the Ministries of Environment, of Prospect and Development, of Agriculture, of Culture, of Water resources, of Foreign Affairs, of Science and Education, of Transports, of Communication, the ministry of Security and that of Economy and Finance.

Six Non Governmental Organisations are also members of the Commission. These organisations are: "Bénin 21, ASED, 'les amis de la terre', ACFD, CIPCRE-Bénin and REDAD". In addition, to reinforce the Convention's implementation in Benin, the leaders have passed some bills regarding environment and desertification. The most important are the bill n° 82-435 prohibiting bush fire, the bill n° 87-013 related to grazing rights, the bill 91-004 of February 11, 1991 on plant-care, the bill 98-030 passed in 1999 and related to the rules and regulation governing environment, the bill n° 96-12 ratifying the international Convention to Combat Desertification, the bill n° 97-193 creating and regulating the National Commission to Combat Desertification, the bills n° 2001-096, n°95-47 and 98-487 related respectively to the creation and functioning of the Environmental Police, to the creation and functioning of Benin Agency for Environment and to the creation and organisation of the National Office for Fauna Management.

The achievements owed to the Convention's implementation are measured and appraised during meetings, panels and colloquiums organised and supported by foreign partners and institutions. These partners contract agreements with Benin to support activities linked to the fight against desertification. Some of the outstanding agreements occurring in the light of the fight against desertification are meant to support the National Fund for Desertification financed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), to support the elaboration of the First National Report and other agreements financed by the Convention's Secretariat, France, the World Bank, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Arab Bank for African Development.

## **II° Measures taken to implement of the Convention**

Ten important projects are being carried out to apply the UN convention to combat desertification. This was made possible thanks to the financial supports of partners such the World Bank, the French Agency of Development (FAD), the West African Development Bank (WADB/BOAD), GTZ/KFW, European Union, etc.

When the second National Report on the implementation of the Convention was published in 2002, the data registered showed some contracts or projects which were completed and others to be continued. In sum, actions made with respect to the fight against desertification from 2002 to 2003 essentially fostered reforestation, crop diversification, land fertilisation as well as the increase of opportunities of saving money in order to deter people from overexploiting fauna and forest resources. The actions to be continued, on their part, were coordinated through contracts and projects under the management of the Office of Forest and Natural Resources of the agriculture ministry.

Since 2003, concrete achievements were obvious at the institutional, law, technical human and strategic plan in regards to environment care.

In addition to the bills passed in the year nineties to create offices of environment allegiance, two important bills are about to be passed, including the one on rural land whose legality had been already controlled by the Supreme Court.

As far as technical and human measures are concerned, concrete actions namely the populations' awareness on the after effects of fire, the abuse of wildlife and wood fire are no more empty words.

In a nutshell, all the measures taken in the process of saving environment and slower desert overhang aim at providing the inhabitants with improved living conditions. Benin Republic has actively participated in most of important consultative activities related to the implementation, monitoring and assessment of the convention at international level.

Among those activities it is important to underline the following:

- The meeting on procedures of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in Parakou in April 2003
- African Ministers' preparatory conference for the sixth Conference of Parties in Cotonou in July 2003
- The sixth Conference of Parties held in Cuba in September 2003,
- The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg from August to September 2002
- The Second General Assembly of the Global Environment Fund in China in October 2002
- The fourth Africa-Asia Forum on combating desertification, held in June 2003 and
- The twenty-second session of the Council of Environment Ministers in Kenya in February 2003.

It is worthy to underline that, some of the Non Governmental Organisation accredited to the United Nations for the Convention's implementation, other NGOs, grassroots community and associations are deeply involved in the implementation of projects and programs. Among them, it can be listed GERED, BENIN – 21, ALPHA OMEGA, GRAIB, API BENIN, JAE, IAMD and GERAM CONSEIL.

There is a partnership with the government to operationalise some projects and programs, related to landscape management, soils restoration, natural resources management, empowerment and capacity building of communities, awareness rising etc. Concrete actions are already taken in specific critically affected areas like: OUESSE, APLAHOUE, DJIDJA, SINENDE, OUAKE and BOUKOUMBE.

### **III°/ Critical analysis of the UN Convention's implementation**

The different plans and projects related to environment are most of the time managed by the Office of Forest and Natural Resources of the Ministry of Agriculture and have resulted in a significant improvement of people's behaviour and awareness towards environment. As for the National Program to Combat Desertification, its implementation is highly dependant of foreign support. And yet, listing and inspection of achievements in the context of the fight against desertification show a praiseworthy table. This is due to the fact that actions engaged in this field are respectful of the National Growth Program; of the constitutional prescriptions; of the

Environmental National Program, of the “Local Agenda 21” (so called to refer to the twenty first century’s challenge about environment and growth adopted by the UN Conference in 1992); of the bill on Environmental regulations in Benin; of Long Term Prospect Studies named Benin 2025 (document predicting what Benin should look like in 2025 and specifying the means to reach this goal) ; and of the document on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

All this amounts to saying that the main projects and program implemented to combat desertification are in perfect accordance with the national strategies and policies of the country.

In addition, the National Program of Environmental Management (PNGE) implemented as part of activities of the Ministry of Environment proved to be efficient in its efforts to lead to a sustainable development.

However, there are some shortcomings perceptible in this document. The main shortcoming in form lies in the fact that some points and activities listed are not in accordance with its logical goals. The lack of follow-up of the activities and actions engaged is as important as the foregoing shortcoming since it leads to incomplete results. The long time required to take necessary steps to release the funds in order to launch the project plays a negative role essentially as far as the fight against coastal erosion is concerned.

#### **IV°/ Conclusion and recommendations**

It results from all that has been said that Benin Republic has set up an efficient policy for the UN Convention to Combat Desertification to be implemented in order to achieve significant goals. The National Program of Environmental Management started in 2002, also endeavours to set up and carry out a tight follow-up of any action related to environmental issues.

However, to remedy the identified shortcomings, it is suggested:

1°/ to harmonize the content of the Environmental Program document;

2°/ to make the environmental projects staff’s members equally informed of the up-to-date realities;

3°/ to ensure accuracy of the follow-up policies so as to avoid delay in the implementation of the plan;

4°/ to establish an appropriate database on environment and a particular and relevant processing system of the data.

The government of Benin Republic is aware of the risk and negative effects of an insane environment on its citizens and has engaged concrete and efficient actions to protect this environment against desert overhang in particular. These efforts deserve to be encouraged by the international community and reinforced by more support.