



REPUBLIC OF EL SALVADOR
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

**NATIONAL REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT
IN EL SALVADOR**

SAN SALVADOR, EL SALVADOR
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SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL REPORT

Background

The Republic of El Salvador is located between latitudes 13° 10' and 14° 27' North and longitudes 87° 43' and 90° 08' West; its the smallest and most densely populated country in the Latin American region. There are several ecological zones, ranging from the savannah vegetation in the central part of the country, the nebulous forests in the high parts until the mangrove forests in the coastal area. Its little territorial extension and a high population density make that the natural resources are subject to the population's growing pressure. For its location in the Slope of the Pacific, it presents a regime of rains with a lingering dry season and a rainy season, which presents a decrease of precipitation for 30 days, called midsummer (canícula). This phenomenon occurs mainly in the East Zone of the country every year, where it usually causes negative impacts on the economy and regional agriculture, mainly in the production of basic grains and the production and distribution of drinkable water for different uses.

Extent and Severity of Desertification

The phenomenon of desertification in El Salvador with regard to its extent, severity and increasing rate; just as it was established by the United Nations Convention to combat Desertification (UNCCD), is a process that still needs to be fully researched. However, in the Raising Awareness Journeys carried out, drought is recognised as an environmental problem, which is seen to a greater extent in the East Zone of the country. The most palpable evidence of this environmental problem is the gradual deterioration of soils, caused by unsustainable human activities, mainly due to ill practices of subsistence agriculture in hillsides and to the inadequate use of soil. Other indirect causes also exist, such as legal, institutional, lack of research, low educational standards and others which seen as a whole, contribute to such a deterioration. In 1985, it was estimated that 59 million metric tons of soils were lost annually by erosion, within 75% of the national territory. It really should be said that a desertification process already exists in the country, assuming that the UNCCD refers to the "deterioration of the physical, chemical and biological properties or the economic properties of soil." It is notorious that in part of the territory soils are more deteriorated in those areas where problems of drought exist. The soil loss due to erosion is a problem that has affected the country for many years.

Past National Efforts to Combat Desertification

On June 27th 1997, the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador ratified the UNCCD, and since then several efforts have been carried out to follow it up in the country. Two Raising Awareness Journeys have been carried out, one in San Salvador in 1998, Capital of the Republic and another in the City of La Unión in 1999, in the country's East Zone. As a result of these efforts the basic inputs have been obtained that will help to draw up the National Action Plan (NAP). An Interinstitutional Committee for National Consultation has been created with representatives of different government's institutions, private sector, a University and a Non-Governmental Organisation which is working in following up the commitments established by the Convention. The drawing

up of the National Report is another important step in the follow up and implementation of the Convention.

Strategies and Established Priorities

The Strategic Plan of the New Alliance put forward for the 1999-2004 period is the main development instrument of the Salvadorean government; it is based on the country's reality, it contains novel positions, visions and integral solutions, an environmental component stands out aiming at human development. Basic conditions are laid down to work for the country's sustainable development where economy and nature work in a harmonious way. In the present Plan of National Development it is evident the intention of approaching the problem of degradation of lands in a more direct and effective way than before. It aims, for instance, at "implementing a policy on managing and rational use of soil to minimise its degradation and use such a resource in a sustainable way". It also sustains that the participation and decentralisation process produces better projects, a more effective and democratic state and a more functional, solid and competitive market. In each one of the policies of the New Alliance, institutional programs have been formulated that contain operative actions to be implemented starting in the year 2000. Within the environmental laws linked with the phenomenon of desertification there are national and sectoral policies and an environmental legislation, which is indirectly related with this phenomenon, being this the most notorious characteristic in the Salvadoran legislation. There exist other plans and several institutions, which have indirect relationships with desertification and drought.

Institutional measures taken

At the moment, the Organ of National Co-ordination (ONC) is the Natural Heritage Direction of the Environment and Natural Resources Ministry (MARN), in charge of formulation, planning and execution of natural resources policies. The National Focal Point of the Convention of the United Nations to combat Desertification is at the MARN offices. The Non governmental Focal Point is the Salvadoran Centre of Appropriate Technology (CESTA). An Interinstitutional Committee of National Consultation has been created, which depends on the Organ of National Co-ordination and the National Focal Point, which meets regularly. Their members are responsible to follow up and co-ordinate activities for the implementation of the Convention. The financial resources of the ONC depend on the annual budget assigned to MARN; therefore, the ONC doesn't count on financial resources of its own. Only a person at MARN (the Focal Point) works in the following up of the Convention, assisting other responsibilities that are commended to him. The country still needs to take the necessary actions to form an institutional framework to control desertification in a coherent and functional way. El Salvador doesn't report progress as regard to connections or local, national links and with the other Central American countries through projects on desertification and degradation of lands which contain social, economic and environmental problems.

Legal Framework

The Political Constitution of El Salvador establishes that the International Conventions ratified by the country are secondary laws and these prevail on other laws when contradictions exist among them, therefore, they are mandatory. Besides, the

Constitution establishes important provisions on environmental education, control of environmental conditions, rights of children and civil rights. Also the Environment Law and its General Regulation are in full operation, as well as the General Law of Fishing Activities, the Law of Conservation of Wild Life, the Forest Law and others which provide a legal framework for the effective implementation of the UNCCD in the country. Special measures don't exist to adapt the current legislation or to introduce new decrees to harmonise them with the principles of the UNCCD.

Participation Process

The participation process has started with the carrying out of two Raising Awareness Journeys to combat desertification, with the participation of sectors involved in the problem. The first Journey was carried out on February 23-24 1998 in the Capital of El Salvador with an attendance of 98 people and the second in the city of La Unión (28-29 October, 1999, attendance 55 people) in the East Zone. The resulting documents of both journeys were published, but it is necessary to make them available to local communities and they are basic inputs for the process of drawing up the NAP. It is considered that there are few barriers for the participation of women, since the gender approach has been spread in the country and certain awareness has been achieved. In June 1999, the Focal Point participated in activities organised during the annual celebrations of environment month, where Desertification Day is included (June 17). The information and communication activities were from person to person, radio interviews or talks to students in educational centres. The function of the Interinstitutional Committee of National Consultation of keeping informed other organisations has been initiated. There is the risk that people may lose interest and motivation when not having a continued follow up of activities carried out.

Process of Consultation

The office of International Co-operation at MARN doesn't have projects related to desertification control with developed countries and other agencies. Therefore, there are no donor countries as yet. El Salvador is being favoured by the technical and financial support for environment coming from abroad and there exists potential available financing sources when negotiating funds for the implementation of the Convention to combat desertification. No consultation and harmonisation process has begun for common actions among Central American countries, the only consultations have been at national level and no work has been done outside the frontiers of El Salvador.

Adopted measures

One of the purposes of the Journeys carried out was to begin with a raising awareness process on the causes and effects of the desertification phenomenon and droughts in the country, caused by unsustainable human activities and climatic variations. Also, basic information was obtained in consensus on the current state of environmental degradation in El Salvador, which can be considered in the drawing up of the NAP in the near future. In such a sense, it can be said that the process of drawing up the NAP has already begun, although it has not been concluded. The Inter-Institutional Committee is planning and co-ordinating the holding in El Salvador of the Sixth Regional Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean of the UNCCD in August 2000. At

the moment, the country lacks specific programs of technical scientific training on the phenomenon of desertification. It is considered that the local capacity has not been prioritised to implement the convention. An investigation program is needed to concentrate on the desertification phenomenon and therefore, there are no concrete measures to increase the know-how on desertification and its control. A reason of weight that explains this situation is the lack of financial funds and of little use of the qualified human resources, which exist in the country. Programs co-ordinated with other Central and Latin American countries don't exist. At national level, the efforts concentrate on the capital San Salvador. No technical and scientific institutions exist at subregional, regional and international levels, which promote the issues of desertification and droughts. An important degree of responsibility is observed in the environmental NGOs, which develop projects with local communities. CESTA, as the Non Governmental Focal Point has begun the process of drawing up an action plan to combat desertification in the East Zone and it has formed a regional team, located in the Usulután province, to assist the local environmental problems; Its members will be responsible for the follow up of the Convention in this zone. Also, a person responsible for the following up of the convention implementation has been appointed at a national level. Association agreements have not been reached with other countries of the Central American subregion, neither with other developed countries and other organisations involved in the implementation of the UNCCD.

Financial contributions

El Salvador has not yet been able to have access to public neither private financing to facilitate it to local actors. Local and international private potential sources of financing have not been explored and a National Fund to combat Desertification has not been established or another specific account to implement the UNCCD. At government level no decisions have been taken yet to determine a mechanism to guarantee the financing of the implementation of the UNCCD and pass to concrete actions to combat desertification and drought. Up to the present, no modalities of the diverse actors' participation in the financing and handling of activities to combat desertification have been set up. It has not been designed any strategy or plan for access to national or international funds with the purpose of counting on resources for the financing of the NAP. The operation of the Focal Point is possible thanks to the funds of the annual budget of the MARN. El Salvador has bilateral and multilateral relationships, which have been supporting diverse initiatives and social and environmental projects. Also, the country receives financing and multilateral technical assistance from international agencies that contribute in many environmental topics. None of these relationships has given technical-financial support directly as regards to control of desertification; however, the potential exists to negotiate and to receive support for the implementation of the UNCCD. Contacts have not been made with the Global Mechanism to request funds and therefore financial support has not been received to implement the Convention. To carry out the two Raising Awareness Journeys and the drawing up and consultation of the National Report a total of \$ 11,000.00 was spent. The funds for these activities came from national and international sources. El Salvador has not yet formulated a plan to request technical co-operation from international agencies. The needs in technical assistance concerning the fight against desertification have not still

been prioritised but the following are proposed: Technical-financial Co-operation for drawing up of the NAP, Programs and integral projects to combat desertification, Projects to combat degradation of lands, Projects of energetical revegetation in areas affected by drought, Municipal Ordinances, Community Participation and of the private sector and others.

Revision of Indicators

El Salvador has not been able to define an appropriate methodology and a conceptual framework for the selection of indicators and parameters on desertification in the country; in order to measure and evaluate the progress achieved. In such a sense, El Salvador doesn't have the parameters and indicators for the programs and projects on desertification. These will be established in the process of drawing up the NAP and they would be used in the monitoring and evaluation. Due to the initial stage in the drawing up of the NAP, no analysis can be made of impacts of the desertification phenomenon in El Salvador.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The efforts made by El Salvador as regards implementation of the Convention of the United Nations to combat Desertification have been few but significant, due specially to lack of financial resources of its own. Among these efforts stand out: the two Raising Awareness Journeys in 1998 and 1999, the operation of the Inter-Institutional Committee of National Consultation and the drawing up of the National Report. Some of the recommendations are: Strengthening the technical-financial capacity of the Organ of National Co-ordination (ONC), of the National Focal Point and of the Interinstitutional Committee of National Consultation, responsible of following up the implementation of the UNCCD in El Salvador. To continue and conclude the drawing up of the National Action Plan (NAP) of El Salvador and the implementation of the UNCCD, which requires specific funds. To negotiate the technical-financial assistance of national or international agencies to carry out the necessary studies and to qualify national personnel on the phenomenon of desertification. To improve intra and interinstitutional co-ordination and the promotion of community participation, establishing agreements. To plan the Third Raising Awareness Journey and to promote the UNCCD content more thoroughly at all levels.