

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

**NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION
TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION /
LAND DEGRADATION
(UNCCD)**

Riga, 2006

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Summary

As the United Nations member country from Central and Eastern Europe, Latvia became a Party to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (hereinafter – Convention) on January 19, 2003 with particular concern to Annex 5. During that period Latvia was completing accession to the Europe Union. Latvia became a member state of the European Union On May 1, 2004. Latvia is still finalizing transition to the full market economy.

Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Latvia is responsible for the implementation of the Convention. Ministry of the Environment has prepared its first National report on the implementation of the Convention in Latvia, which summarizes all the activities taken since ratification of the Convention.

Latvia does not belong to the countries where deserts have any influence, but it has lots of impacts from land degradation processes. The main types of land degradation are erosion caused by, wind and water, including erosion of the Baltic Sea coast. Other types of degradation are soil compaction; lowering of the soil surface; waterlogging; soil acidification; heavy metals in agricultural soil; soil pollution by pesticides and other organic contaminants; eutrophication by nitrates and phosphates; fertility decline and reduced organic matter content. Land degradation processes are mainly caused by improper land use, especially agricultural practices, and excessive or ill-managed state-run or private logging. Land degradation in Latvia declines the richness of biodiversity (including agrobiodiversity), alters traditional rural landscapes and impacts general stability of ecosystems, including the resilience to climate change due to the reduction of photosynthesis, biological activity and weakening of fundamental soil functions.

The legislative baseline in Latvia is considerably strong. There are appropriate legislative instruments, and sectoral policies in place to provide an adequate enabling environment. However, these instruments can sometimes be contradictory or leave gaps, and they do not provide a unified vision of sustainable land management in the country. There is considerable expertise, technical capacity and information base in the country, however, this is often a specialized and sectoral knowledge, resulting in *ad hoc* and unlinked activities.

- During 2003 – 2004 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with Latvia “Environmental projects” and Ministry of the Environment implemented the project on *Latvia National capacity self-assessment in field of biodiversity, climate change and soil degradation*.
- Since September 2005 UNDP and Global Environment Facility (GEF) in cooperation with Ministry of the Environment runs out UNDP/GEF Medium-Size project (MSP) on *Building Sustainable Capacity and Ownership to Implement UNCCD objectives in Latvia*.

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I Introduction

On October 9, 2002 Latvia enforced the law on “United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa” (UNCCD). Law was worked out in order to ratify the Convention and implement its requirements. **Latvia became a Party to the Convention on January 19, 2003.** Implementation of the Convention in Latvia will ensure the realization of soil protection measures, promoting the increase of soil productivity, providing sustainable management of soil and water resources, thus improving social conditions what is the main goal of the Convention.

Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Latvia is responsible for the implementation of the Convention. To promote the process of the implementation of the Convention, Ministry cooperates with other relevant institutions, organizations and stakeholders.

Ministry of the Environment has prepared its first National report on the implementation of the Convention in Latvia, which summarizes all the activities taken since ratification of the Convention. This National report was prepared in consultation with relevant institutions and organizations, such as Ministry of Agriculture; Latvia University of Agriculture; Latvia University; Latvia Central Statistical Bureau; Latvian Environmental, Geological and Meteorological Agency and other supervised institutions by the Ministry of the Environment and also UNDP Latvia.

II Overview on situation and land degradation in Latvia

Territory of Latvia is situated in northeastern Europe with a coastline along the Baltic Sea with borders of Estonia, Lithuania, Russia and Belarus. Its area covers 64,589 sq km with a total population of 2.3 million people. Climate is maritime, wet with moderate winters. From whole area 40% is agricultural land, 47% forests and 13% other (see. detailed country profile in Annex I).

The main types of land degradation are erosion caused by, wind and water, including erosion of the Baltic Sea coast. The total extent of water-eroded soil is estimated at 17.3 % from the total agricultural land (0.43 mil. ha) from which 12.5 % fall into slightly and 4.8 % into medium and strong erosion classes. There are significant variations among the administrative regions of Latvia where water eroded soils can occur from 0 % (in Jelgava region –central part of Latvia, Zemgale) up to 45 % (in Krāslava region – eastern part of Latvia, Latgale). Sandy and organic (peatlands) soils, which are used for field crop production as well as regions bordering on the Baltic Sea, are at risk of wind erosion. As many factors that are natural and human-induced significantly influence the wind erosion process, there are still no detailed statistics and estimates of the causes, extent and effects of wind erosion in Latvia. The Baltic Sea coast erosion is estimated as 70 % (345 km) from its total length.

Both, wind and water erosion are considered causes for decrease of soil productivity, as well as an important factor contributing to the pollution of water bodies. Decrease of agricultural production and, subsequently, of the land-use intensity will likely lead to more flexibility in land use and possibility of avoiding the use of vulnerable land for intensive agriculture. This is a stabilizing factor that can limit the affects of erosion for agricultural land, but, on the other hand, increasing deforestation raises the risk of erosion on areas which were expected to be stable before.

Other types of degradation are soil compaction; lowering of the soil surface; waterlogging; soil acidification; heavy metals in agricultural soil; soil pollution by pesticides and other organic contaminants; eutrophication by nitrates and phosphates; fertility decline and reduced organic matter content.

Land degradation processes are mainly caused by improper land use, especially agricultural practices, and excessive or ill-managed state-run or private logging. In terms of agriculture, the main causes are unbalanced crop rotations with large percentage of annual crops, limited use of soil conservation tillage and other methods, inadequate crop residue use, unsustainable plant nutrient management, improper irrigation and drainage management systems and inappropriate rent-tenure relationships that preclude any incentives as well as endorsement of administrative measures to promote adoption of sustainable land management practices on overly fragmented land. In terms of deforestation, the main cause is inadequate incentives, knowledge, and organization to abide by afforestation laws. Land degradation is more evident in the areas of lower soil fertility and low suitability for intensive farming. Low-incomes result in greater exploitation and pressure on the land, while at the same time limited capacity to take preventive and rehabilitative measures to improve the situation.

Land degradation in Latvia declines the richness of biodiversity (including agrobiodiversity), alters traditional rural landscapes and impacts general stability of ecosystems, including the resilience to climate change due to the reduction of photosynthesis, biological activity and weakening of fundamental soil functions. It is not possible to estimate the extent to which the land degradation impacts a biological diversity at this time due to limited soil and vegetation monitoring activities. Therefore, establishing the detailed baseline data and information is greatly required.

III Activities related to the implementation of the Convention

1. Policy and legislation

The legislative baseline in Latvia is considerably strong. There are appropriate legislative instruments, and sectoral policies in place to provide an adequate enabling environment. However, these instruments can sometimes be contradictory or leave gaps, and they do not provide a unified vision of sustainable land management in the country. There is considerable expertise, technical capacity and information base in the country, however, this is often a specialized and sectoral knowledge, resulting in *ad hoc* and unlinked activities.

The Government of Latvia is strongly committed to implement sustainable land management practices. Although Latvia ratified UNCCD on 2002, the National Environmental Policy Plan for 2004 – 2008 (adopted 08.02.2004) foresees concrete actions for the inventory of land contamination sites, the sanitation of polluted sites, preservation and protection of soil quality, and measures to decrease soil erosion and degradation of agricultural lands.

Current policy related to soil and land protection:

- Law on Environmental protection (adopted 06.08.1991, latest amendments 03.02.2005), sets out the definition on soil and necessary legislation.
- Law on Pollution (adopted 15.03.2001, with latest amendments on 06.04.2006), sets the main goals to protect soil from pollution and work out necessary legislation.

- Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No.365 of August 20, 2002 "Regulations on the Use, Monitoring and Control of Sewage Sludge and Its Composts" regulate the procedures of use, as well as monitoring and control of sewage sludge and its composts. Use of sewage sludge and its compost which is classified as hazardous waste (in accordance with mentioned rules above on sewage sludge) is regulated by legislation on Waste management. The revised regulations on sewage sludge will come into force on November 1, 2006.
- Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 531 of December 18, 2001 "Regulations for Water and Soil Protection Against Contamination by Nitrates Caused by Agricultural Activities" determine the requirements for the water and soil protection against contamination by nitrates caused by agricultural activities; particularly vulnerable areas, to which more stringent requirements regarding the water and soil protection against contamination by nitrates caused by agricultural activities are applicable, and their boundaries, as well as the criteria for the determination of such areas and management procedures. The procedure on management is stipulated in the programme developed by Ministry of Agriculture Order Nr.163 of March 18, 2004 "Action Programme for vulnerable zones subject to special requirements for protection of waters and soil against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources".
- Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No.628 July 27, 2004 "Regulations on special requirements regarding pollution activities in animal farms" which regulates pollution prevention activities from animal farms (with 10 and more animal units in whole territory, and from 5 to more animal units in vulnerable zones), to prevent pollution of ground and surface water from manure and silage use and storage. These regulations refer to whole Latvia territory.
- Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 804 of October 25, 2005 "Regulations on Quality Standards for Soil and Ground" where threshold values for assessment of soil and ground quality are mentioned. One of purpose is to take an account for rehabilitation of contaminated sites.
A database of polluted and potentially polluted sites has been built during year 2004; it takes account of all kinds of pollution.
- Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 294 of July 9, 2002 „On Application of Category A, B and C Polluting Activities and Permitting of Category A and B Polluting Activities”, which incorporate legal forms in compliance with the European Union Directives.

2. Actions taken in order to implement UNCCD in Latvia

- During 2003 – 2004 UNDP in collaboration with Latvia "Environmental projects" and Ministry of the Environment implemented the project on *Latvia National capacity self-assessment in field of biodiversity, climate change and soil degradation*.

Project was financed by UNDP and GEF and was finished by the end of year 2004. The main objective of this project was to identify priorities and needs for capacity development in Latvia in order to address global environment issues. Analysis were concentrated on three thematic areas – climate change, biological diversity and land degradation, however it will also explore synergies among these thematic areas (UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD). The aim of this project was to analyse the existent situation, to find out the deficiencies and problems in institutional, social, administrative, managerial, legal, informative and technical system levels.

To set out priorities and increase the capacity in field of biodiversity, climate change and soil degradation.

Project results showed the main causes and barriers in the implementation of the UNCCD and set out priority needs/constraints regarding land degradation as follows:

- ✓ Lack of Integrated Soil Research Program;
- ✓ Existing soil monitoring is inadequate and requires more comprehensive and integrated approach;
- ✓ Lack of a national-level strategic approach to soil protection and management that includes a FAO-consistent soil mapping and control system;
- ✓ Insufficient capacity and financial resources to prepare the Implementation Strategy (the National Action Plan) for implementing the UNCCD.

▪ Since September 2005 UNDP and GEF in cooperation with Ministry of the Environment runs out UNDP/GEF Medium-Size project (MSP) on ***Building Sustainable Capacity and Ownership to Implement UNCCD objectives in Latvia.***

The project has emerged as a result of the above mentioned UNDP/GEF supported National Capacity Needs Self-Assessment for Global Environmental Management (NCSA) process, implemented during 2003 – 2004. At the priority setting seminars held in the course of the project, all key stakeholders from different ministries and agencies concerned have agreed that sustainable land management is a priority theme. These issues have not been on the priority agenda prior to ratification of UNCCD and yet Latvia is only at the initial stage of implementing this convention.

The main goal of the project is to create sustainable capacity and ownership in Latvia to mitigate land degradation and thereby meet the country's obligations under the UNCCD.

The main objective of the project is capacity building and removal of key barriers to sustainable land management in Latvia.

The expected outcomes of the project are:

- ✓ National land policy rationalized and sustainable land management mainstreamed into the policy and regulatory framework;
- ✓ Local capacities built to adopt sustainable land management practice in the selected areas;
- ✓ Improved knowledge and technical capacities for sustainable land management in Latvia.

As a capacity building project, it is expected to contribute to the global benefit of enhancing ecosystem health, resilience, stability and services. The project will also have national and local benefits in terms of developing the capacities and enabling environment for long term sustainability of development actions. As well as project will improve public awareness, information sharing, capacity development and coordination among different sectors.

To consolidate and harmonize the national land policy to support sustainable land management and mitigate land degradation processes overall stocktaking will be performed through analysis of existing situation, comparing it to the examples of other countries, resulting in necessary changes to the land policy and regulatory documents. Process is foreseen to be carried out by extensive discussions among stakeholders to ensure the ownership of the results.

There is also considerable expertise, technical capacity and information base in the country, however, this is often a specialized and sectoral knowledge, resulting in ad hoc and unlinked activities. Therefore there is the need for institutional mechanism to coordinate activities taken by different organizations both governmental and non-governmental. During the same process also information system to support sustainable land management will be developed.

One of the key barriers to sustain sustainable land management practices is the available funding both to the governmental sector as well as to local stakeholders (land users, land planners). Actions will be taken to evaluate and create available funds to support activities that contribute to the sustainable land management practice.

Presently there is already ongoing stocktaking process to develop baseline information of land degradation in the country using existing data that is made available by different institutions as well as performing inventory process in selected pilot territories to support, update and validate existing data.

Throughout project activities there will be extensive work done on building local capacities for sustainable land management by disseminating materials and performing training of local land users and local decision makers. Although initially this process is limited to selected pilot areas, there will be developed a replication plan of these activities to be carried out over whole country.

The Government of Latvia through the Latvian Environmental Protection Fund makes the co-financing available to the project. Latvian non-governmental organizations (including academic institutions) also contribute to the project funding.

In general this medium-sized project is considered a crucial first step in the overall implementation of the UNCCD in Latvia, as it will lift key barriers to the sustainability of such actions.

3. National Action Plan

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

The obligations set out by the Convention is planned to be implemented through the National Action Plan to implement the UNCCD.

Elaboration process of NAP in Latvia will start at second half of 2006 and will be completed by end of 2007. It will be based on stocktaking/inventory process of land degradation situation in country performed in selected areas that will be completed by end of 2006.

Process of elaboration will involve extensive expert work on key issues relevant for implementation of UNCCD. It will be followed by working group meetings to sustain discussions by all stakeholders. Process will be completed with public hearing sessions. NAP will be adopted by Cabinet of Ministers.

NAP will set forth plan of activities that Latvia will undertake to ensure implementation of UNCCD.

4. Future development co-operation

Since the ratification of the UNCCD Latvia has actively participated in various activities and meetings related to the implementation of the Convention.

On May 1, 2004 Latvia became a member state of the European Union and ranks so called new donor countries. Latvia has gradually drawn closer to the group of developed countries and in the area of human development Latvia is among the 50 most developed countries of the 177 countries assessed by the United Nations. After the accession to the European Union, whose total contribution constitutes more than 50% of the total development assistance provided worldwide, Latvia, together with the other member states, is actively participating in the implementation of the Community's development policy by providing support to less developed countries. Latvia is becoming increasingly involved in global events, as well as in discussions and problem solving of issues of sustainable development, poverty reduction and other matters linked to assisting less developed countries. While the attention of the big donor countries is mainly directed at the African region, Latvia currently is interested in the economic growth, stability and strengthening of democracy in neighbouring regions. Therefore, Latvia has set the republics to the East from the European Union border as its development assistance priority regions for 2006 (Georgia and Moldova). In implementing its development co-operation, Latvia does not provide direct financial assistance. Rather, it provides assistance by sharing its experience in implementing public administration reforms, promoting a democratic society and social development, environment protection and improving the educational system. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been appointed the responsible institution.

Therefore, since ratification of the UNCCD, Latvia is building up the national capacity and ownership to implement UNCCD requirements that could promote future development assistance, providing experts, suitable technologies, know-how and information for developing countries. International cooperation in order to combat land degradation and desertification is only starting to develop.

UNCCD Country Profile LATVIA

June, 2006.

This UNCCD country profile has been provided by:

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Biophysical indicators relating to desertification and drought

1. Climate:

1.1. Index of aridity ¹	1.5
1.2. Normal rainfall	668 mm
1.3. Rainfall standart deviation	83 mm
Sub-national areas (mm)	<u>no data available</u>

2. Vegetation and land use

2.1. NDVI (normalized difference vegetation index)	<u>no data available</u>
2.2. Vegetation cover (% of total land area)	97.01%
2.3. Land use (percent of total land)	

Land use	1990 – 1999	2000 – 2005
Arable crop land	14.07%	14.14%
Irrigated		
Rainfed		
Pasture	14.37%	14.29%
Forest and woodland	50.47%	50.47%
Other land	21.10%	21.10%

* Data from Image & CORINE Land Cover 2000 (CLC2000) for year 1995 and 2000, where minimum mapping area is 25 ha.

Arable crop land – comply with CLC2000 class 211

Pasture – comply with CLC2000 class 231

Forest and woodland – comply with CLC2000 class 31 and 32.

2.4. Surface albedo (monthly)

Month	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Albedo (%)	70	64	45	22	22	23	23	22	22	29	42	70

* Average value for period 1991-2002.

3. Water resources

3.1. Fresh water availability (million m ³):	
Available fresh ground water resources	670 million m ³ /per year (1974)
Available resources of groundwater suitable for drinking	470 million m ³ /per year (1999)
3.2. Renewable fresh water resources per capita	16.8 m ³ /per year
3.3. Agricultural water use (million m ³)	2,915 million m ³ (2004)
3.4. Industrial water use (million m ³)	48,856 million m ³ (2004)

4. Energy

Consumption

4.1. Energy use per capita (kg oil equivalent)	1815.7 (2005)
4.2. Agricultural energy use per hectare (millions of BTU)	no data available
* Agricultural energy use	76.49 toe (2005)

Production

4.3. Energy from renewables excluding combustible renewables and waste (% of total supply)	69% (2005)
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Renewables - Consumption by sector (*combustible fuels only*)

4.4. Industry (% of total renewable consumption)	22% (2005)
4.5. Residential (% of total renewable consumption)	62% (2005)
4.6. Agriculture (% of total renewable consumption)	2% (2005)

5. Types of land degradation

General information:

Erosion caused by, wind and water, including erosion of the Baltic Sea coast.

Soil compaction; lowering of the soil surface; waterlogging; soil acidification; heavy metals in agricultural soil; soil pollution by pesticides and other organic contaminants; eutrophication by nitrates and phosphates; fertility decline and reduced organic matter content and also abandoned lands.

Type of degradation	1990 – 2005	
	thsd. ha	Percent (%)
Wind erosion	230	14.7 % of arable land
Water erosion	380	24.3 % of arable land
Acidification of agricultural soil		40 % total
Decline of fertility and organic mater		35 – 40 % of lands used in agriculture
Abandoned land	350 - 400	
Subsidence of organic soil (peatlands)	100	

6. Rehabilitation

Lands under rehabilitation	1990 - 2005
Rehabilitation of degraded crop land (km ²)	No data available
Rehabilitation of degraded rangeland (km ²)	No data available
Rehabilitation of degraded forest (km ²)	Not relevant

Socio-economic indicators related to desertification and drought

7. People and economy

7.1. Population (total)	<u>2294.6 thsd (2005)</u>
▪ Population: urban (percent of total)	<u>68% (2005)</u>
▪ Population: rural (percent of total)	<u>32% (2005)</u>
7.2. Population growth (annual %)	<u>-0.51 (2005)</u>
7.3. Life expectancy (years)	<u>72 (2005)</u>
7.4. Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	<u>7.8 (2005)</u>
7.5. GDP (current US\$)	<u>15818 mln. (2005)</u>
7.6. GNI per capita (current US\$)	<u>6781.5 (2005)</u>
7.7. Risk of poverty rate (% of population)	<u>19 (2004)</u>
7.8. Crop production (thsd.tons):	<u>Cereals 1059,5 (2004)</u>
	<u>Sugar beets 505,6 (2004)</u>
	<u>Potatoes 628,4 (2004)</u>
	<u>Vegetables 180,8 (2004)</u>
7.9. Livestock production (tons):	<u>108611 (live weight) (2004)</u>
	<u>73233 (slaughter weight) (2004)</u>

8. Human development

8.1. Primary education completion rate (% age group)	<u>22,6% (2005)</u>
8.2. Number of women in rural development (total number)	<u>283.8 thsd.person (2005)</u>
8.3. Unemployment (% of total)	<u>5,5% (2005)</u>
8.4. Youth unemployment rate (age 15-24)	<u>12,9% (2005)</u>
8.5. Illiteracy total (% age 15 and above)	<u>0,2 % (2005)</u>
8.6. Illiteracy male (% age 15 and above)	<u>0,2 % (2005)</u>
8.7. Illiteracy female (% age 15 and above)	<u>0,2 % (2005)</u>

9. Science and technology:

Institutions involved currently:
 University of Latvia
 Latvia University of Agriculture
 Agrochemical Research Center

10. Please specify the data sources

1. Latvian Environmental, Geological and Meteorological Agency (subpoints: 1.1., 1.2., 1.3., 2.2., 2.3., 2.4., 3.1., 3.3., 3.4.)
2. Latvia Central Statistical Bureau (points: 4. and 7.)
3. Latvia University of Agriculture (point: 5 and subpoints: 7.8., 7.9)
4. Labour Force survey (subpoints: 8.1., 8.2., 8.3., 8.4.)