

**Summary of the Second National Report of
the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
on the Implementation of the United Nation's Convention
to Combat Desertification
UNCCD
April 2002**

Introduction:

This report is prepared according to the UNCCD documents (ICCD/CRIC(1)INF5) and to the communication with the UNCCD secretariat., It will highlight the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia efforts on sustainable development and combating desertification. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia lies in the continental west dry desert belt with frequent drought cycles. The Kingdom is therefore very vulnerable to recurrent droughts and desertification. The government started very early (during the sixties of the last century) conservation measures for its renewable natural resources and has taken actions to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. Considerable attention was paid between 1960 and 1990 to conserve soil, water and natural vegetation cover. Major efforts were also exerted on resource inventory, evaluation, development, conservation and proper utilization .Great emphasis was made in the improvement of technical skills, institutional arrangements and development of infrastructures crucial for both national development and environmental conservation.

The kingdom incorporated all activities related to conservation and development of renewable natural resources into its annual Five-Year Development Plan, framework building upon chapter 12 of Agenda 21 and the UNCCD and benefiting from international experiences and efforts. The Kingdom also made the commitment to support efforts in this direction both at the sub- regional , regional and international levels.

The Strategy and National Action Programme (NAP) to combat desertification was developed in accordance with the guidelines stipulated in the Convention and the Asia Annex.

The Kingdom participated in the relevant regional and sub regional conferences and meetings on conservation and development of renewable natural resources , particularly those related to Sub- Regional Action Programs to Combat Desertification in West Asia (SRAP) . The Kingdom is actively involved in implementation of ongoing activities such as projects on sustainable management of vegetation cover and water resources (TN1& TN2). The Kingdom also participated on the regional Thematic Programme Networks on rangelands and sand dune fixation (TPN-3) and water resources management (TPN-4) and other regional networks.

The National Committee for Preparation of the Strategy and National Action Programme to Combat Desertification held several meetings during 2001 and 2002. The draft of the document was developed with technical assistance from the United Nations Environmental Programme- Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA). The document is expected to be finalized and approved in 2002.

Several actions were also taken to ensure the effectiveness and success of the efforts and programs to combat desertification and conservation of renewable natural resources and the environment. These actions include; institutional development, bibliography and literature gathering of subjects related to desertification, and monitoring and evaluation of impacts of desertification. The Kingdom's experience in development and conservation of its natural resources was critically evaluated. Monitoring and impact assessment was implemented and favorable results were used for wider application while negative actions were abandoned. The monitoring and evaluation exercise was useful in establishing a data base relevant to desertification at both the national, sub-regional and regional level. The result was also used in the preparation of new legislations and regulations for conservation, proper utilization of renewable natural resources and protection of the environment. This was also used in updating of previous regulations.

Several actions are currently underway in the capacity building of the national staff to raise their skills on using modern technologies and methods in the implementation of national action programmes. This will help in meeting national objectives, policies and strategies and in conformity with relevant articles in the convention.

The government emphasized the need of adoption of a comprehensive national program that should be extended to all the regions in the Kingdom for all stakeholders in the civil society in the capacity building for conservation and development of natural resources and the environment.

The action program includes the following:

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

It was pointed in the Kingdom's first report the following strategies were adopted :

- National strategy for health and environment
- Strategy and national action programme to combat desertification in conformity with chapter 12 of agenda 21.
- Strategy and national action plan on conservation of biodiversity (under preparation).
- National plan on coastal zone management (draft).
- National strategy of the environment (under preparation).

Now the following strategies are under preparation:

- National strategy of the environment
- Strategy and national action plan on biodiversity conservation .
- National strategy for forests
- National strategy for tourism
- Updating and completion of the national plan for water resources.

2. Institutional measures taken to implement the convention

This topic was addressed in greater detail in the Kingdom's first report. Several institutions and committees crucial for conservation of renewable natural resources and the environment were initiated. The most important of which are:

- Approval of establishment a new Ministry for Water. The new ministry will include all sectors of relevance to water. The purpose of establishing the new ministry is to emphasis of the importance of water and conservation of all water resources.
- Establishment of Supreme Tourism Authority
- Establishment of Saudi Agency for Geologic Survey
- Establishment of the Supreme Council for Investment
- Establishment of the National Committee for the preparation of concrete action programme for preparedness to natural disasters.

3. Participatory process in support of preparation and implementation of national action programs

As soon as the Kingdom became a party to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in 1997, it established a National Committee. The Committee consists of representatives from all government ministries and agencies pertinent to desertification and renewable natural resources and was mandated to prepare the Kingdom's national action programme to combat desertification. The members of these committee include:

The ministries of Agriculture and Water, Interior, Finance and National Economy, Higher Education, Planning, Municipality and Rural Affairs, Communication and ministry of Information. Specialized institutions such as King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, General Council for Meteorology and Environmental protection, National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development and Prince Sultan Center for Environment, Water and Desert Research (King Saud University) are also members of the national committee. The committee had several meetings on 2001 and 2002, the draft document for national action programme was completed with technical assistance from the United Nations Environmental Program- Regional Office for West Asia.

4. Activities relevant to Combating Desertification that have been implemented:

The national action programme isn't adopted yet, but several relevant programs are under implementation. The most important operational projects are:

- A) Inventory and evaluation of range and forest cover throughout the Kingdom
- B) Updating of studies about water resources

C) Review and updating of existing legislations and regulations pertaining to renewable natural resources i.e. range & forestry , water resources conservation , utilization of sewage water for irrigation , unified veterinary quarantine for countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council , general regulation for the environment, using of treated sewage water in irrigation , unified regulation for agricultural(Plant & animal) Quarantine for countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council . The draft of national action programme also included effective implementation measures in development and conservation of renewable natural resources such as :

- Rehabilitation of deteriorated areas and improvement of its productivity through implementation of relevant programs (afforestation , sand dune fixation , establishment of protected areas etc)
- Community participation in the development, management and conservation of renewable natural resources (through environmental awareness campaigns)
- Expansion in management and utilization of none conventional water sources (sewage treated water, agricultural drainage water, saline water etc)
- Detailed hydrologic studies in regions where detailed, hydrologic studies were conducted in areas where hydrologic studies were not carried out in the past.
- Updating and upgrading of national hydrologic net (weather stations, flood gauges& stream flows, test wells etc)
- Conservation and proper use of renewable natural resources through implementation of national legislations , regulations and national campaign programs targeted to resource conservation.
- Capacity building and human resource development through special training programs for all stakeholders in the area of desertification control and conservation of renewable natural resources.
- Raising awareness of all categories of the civil society on the importance of renewable natural resources and significance of their conservation by implementing a comprehensive extension program through the national mass media
- Conservation and development of renewable natural resources were incorporated in the curriculum of schools

5. Financial allocation from national budgets to support the implementation of NAP

Allocation of funds are made in the annual national budget for development and conservation of renewable natural resources (soil, water, vegetation cover, agricultural production of both plants and animals, wildlife etc) through the specialized government intuitions involved in renewable natural resources such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Water (responsible for water , soil , range & forestry , national parks and animal production) , the National Commission for Wildlife conservation and Development , General Administration for Meteorology and Environmental Protection(Presidency for Meteorology and Environmental Protection

, Ministry of Municipality and Rural Affairs , King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology , universities and research centers.

Community based projects initiated at district levels by the local communities, carried out by specialized technical agencies are funded when approved by the supreme council of the government in each region. The private sector makes modest contributions to renewable natural resources and particularly to wildlife conservation and development

6. Review of benchmarks and indicators utilized to measure program and assessment there off

The government setup a monitoring network using relevant standard guidelines and parameters for different resources. New projects aimed at improving the monitoring guidelines and comprehensive actions were taken on the following;

- Inventory and evaluation of the vegetative cover of the Kingdom by a multi disciplinary team
- Survey , inventory and evaluation of wildlife
- Inventory and evaluation of some agricultural lands
- Inventory and evaluation of the status of water in some regions of the Kingdom.