

Summary of the National Report of Syria

Desertification is a major constraint on development in the Syrian Arab Republic, particularly overall most of the Syrian Badia Rangelands (Steppe Zone) and the margin zone which is located between the Badia zone and the agricultural lands. Both zones which originally do have fragile ecosystem are suffering of mismanagement and misuse of natural resources in addition to severe disorder of the ecological system since the end of the 50s. Beside that many factors are still playing a major role in deterioration of the environment overall both zones such as drought which attack the area for many years. It is no wonder then that policies and development plans are recently more concerned about the issues of environment health, perfect and rational use of resources, sustainability and ensuring the welfare of future generations.

The last development plans in the Syrian Arab Republic has concentrated on the necessity and importance of protection of environment in addition to conservation and rehabilitation of deteriorated natural resources with the guarantee and adoption of sustainable development principles of all natural resources specially the unrevived ones, and promoting collaboration and participation of local national communities in preparing and implementing of NAP based on participatory approach.

Through activities of the Ministry of State for Env. Affaires specially at the last five years, the MSEA has prepared and developed several strategies and national action programmes related to Agenda 21 as:

- ?? National building capacity which is funded by the world Bank
- ?? Protecting of Ozone layer which is funded by UNEP
- ?? National studying of Biodiversity.
- ?? National Strategy of Biodiversity.

One of the most important recommendation of the National Environmental Strategy was the preparing of National Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Syria in order to guarantee the integration between development and environment at the national level.

Before 1995 the national effort had been concentrated on some projects and programmes funded through the Syrian government or through technical and financial assistance / cooperation with International / Arabian Organization in order to stop land degradation and promote rational use of natural resources, among pilot projects or locally.

In 1995 the Syrian government in close collaboration with Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) has prepared a National Action Programme (NAP) to Combat desertification. The Programme advocated the following:

- ?? The rational use and conservation of natural resources.
- ?? Take all possibility procedures to involve the population /target groups in designing and implementing their development programmes and in decision making,
- ?? Empowering them to plan and lead actions to improve their living conditions while sustaining their resource heritage.
- ?? It called for adopting an integrated and holistic approach to achieve economic development and alleviate poverty.

Most recently the government, in collaboration with UNDP has initiated a project on National Action Programme for Combating Desertification in Syria. This project will build on the existing NAP to formulate an integrated programme that contributes to the existing efforts in order to achieve the set goals and targets, and to meet government commitments. The New NAP will streamline with other environment strategies and programmes, enhance the integration of existing projects and ensure coordinated action and to enhance coordination.

The new National Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Syria is expected to be enhanced and integrated with other environmental /development strategies and programmes and provide adequate coordination between all stakeholders, and clarification all activities which might be implemented on regional / sub- regional level.

Local communities specially women is expected to get benefits of this NAP through training, awareness programmes to increase their knowledge and environmental education about desertification and its causes and impacts on natural resources, food production, national economy and population who are living inside or out side the effected areas, in addition to its great negative impact on local community. Participatory approach is expected to provide the suitable mean to encourage all efforts and coordinate them in order to streamline the knowledge and experience of all concerned national stakeholders, NGOs., and regional research centers to cooperate and assist in formulating NAPs to protect the environment and combat desertification and reducing the impact of drought.

The ministry of State for Environmental Affaires has been designated as the Focal Point for implementing NAP to combat desertification. Within MSEA the Department of Soil and Land Conservation is the National Coordination Body (NCB) for all matters regarding UNCCD. The head of this department is also the national focal point as well as the national Coordinator NAP to combat desertification which is funded by UNDP.

Tow committees has been formulated to implement the NAPcd, included all stakeholders, NGOs, representatives of UNDP, International organizations such as ACSAD, ICARDA, AOAD and research centers. e NCB financial resources are derived from MSEA common budget but a sizeable support comes from the UNDP assisted project and the Syrian Government. The National five-Year Development Plan allocates funds to projects and programmes with elements to combat Desertification.

At present NCB has no database but plans and current efforts are directed to establish this facility. Databases exist at some government institutions and regional organizations (ACSAD, AOAD and ICARDA) and the research centers, which are members of the SC and the NTC. NCB can collaborate with and draw information from these databases to make assessment and analysis to prepare and formulate the programme of priority.

Project management has facilities of communications such as (telephone fax and e-mail) and other audio/video equipment and a 4 wheel drive vehicle.

Currently raising awareness and encouraging local populations to participate in resource conservation and checking land degradation is done mainly within the context of environmental education campaigns. Government institutions, NGOs and projects are active in this respect. MSE has an Information and Environmental Awareness Committee, which can

also coordinate efforts to inform and educate the public about UNCCD and relevant actions.

Collaboration with the international community in arresting land degradation and combating Desertification commenced early through projects on rangeland rehabilitation, forestry, land management, irrigation and water resources management through assistance from France, Germany, Italy, FAO, UNDP, UNEP and others. However, the government has not yet determined specific mechanisms to ensure funding for projects and programmes that will be formulated within the NAP under preparation.

The Syrian Government has not define a suitable mechanism to get financial support for projects and programmes derived from implementing National Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Syria.

In the efforts to formulate practical indicators to monitor the implementation of the UNCCD use should be made of methodology developed by GORS, other national institutions ACSAD and ICARDA.