

2 – Summary

- Introduction

Syria is a dry and semi dry country with limited water resources, the area of Syria is 185179.71 km² and the population growth rate is high as it increased from 9.046 million in 1980 to 18.138 million in 2005, which increased pressures on the resources especially soil and water and obviously on AL-Badiah (steppe land) an area of 10.2 million hectares, and an annual rainfall of 200 mm. Land degradation increase has been attributed to cultivation, over grazing, deforestation, soil salinity, in addition to forest fires. Land degradation in Syria increased by more than 59% of total area due to such factors.

The priority of the Syrian Government is land degradation and desertification that have been increasing to a large extent leading to negative consequences.

This phenomenon is considered as the main reason for natural resources deterioration and yield decrease, human suffering, sand dunes, increasing poverty standard, and slowing down economic development.

There for combating desertification projects expanded, the amount 107,506,700,000 thousand Syrian pounds was allocated for the projects in the tenth-five-years plan (2006-2010) noting that the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform is one of the stakeholders involved in combating desertification projects.

This report presents a summary of the efforts and measures taken to implement the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and showing the phases of its development.

3 - Strategies and priorities established within the framework of sustainable development plans and/or policies:

National plans and strategies available in other social and economic fields:

I- National Development Plans :

Syria participated in the Global Conference for Sustainable Development in 2002 and is fully aware of the importance of relationships between economic and social development and the importance of natural resources management

to reach sustainable development. The government included programs of combating desertification land degradation mitigation in the sustainable development plan and national development plans.

The most important plans are:

- a- The seventh social and economic development plan for 1991-1995.
- b- The eighth social and economic development plan for 1996-2000.
- c- The ninth social and economic development plan for 2001-2005

This plan concentrated on environmental issues particularly combating desertification and determines the means to prevent the negative effects of such cases:

_ formulating an integrated program to develop AL-Badiyah and rangeland management and increase the services offered to the local population.

_ reclassify forest areas and their environmental division, and invest in them economically, combat fires, and support governmental institutions.

This plan focused on supporting projects under construction, in addition to implementation of new projects related to desertification combating and enhance living standard for the rural communities.

The tenth social and economic development plan for 2006-2010:

The tenth five year plan forms an extension to the economic reform policies which have started in the ninth yearly plan (2001-2005) as this period experienced very important changes in the public life of the Syrian society. In term of economics, it was translated in the open economy and attracting the private investment in many sectors which were restricted for the public sector such as banks, insurance, and other activities.

At the same time the government prepared the suitable services which needed in the business sector by releasing, adjusting, and modernizing many of related laws and legislations.

The tenth five yearly plans are distinguished from others in many ways:

- Adopting the indicative planning.
- Participatory methodology in formulating aims.
- Adopting the future expectations.

- Developing and following a national system for priorities in projects selection.
- Linking up planning and implementing stages.
- Clarity in allocating the roles in implementing the plan.
- National plan with regional and local plans.
- Adoption the poverty control plan.

In addition, the tenth-five-yearly-plan includes many national plans' programs to combat desertification especially in the steppe and basins, and many other issues related to the plan implementation. For example:

1- Create job opportunities and poverty alleviation by:

- Link up economic policies with poverty alleviation and considering social cost.
- extend economic opportunity for poor and less developed regions by projects and programs.

2- Environmental sector and disasters management:

- mitigating all pollution aspects, combating desertification and conserving biodiversity.
- design a national plan to facing environmental emergencies and mitigate pollution and making a time-table to implement the environmental plan.

3- Developing the Eastern region:

Design a special development plan for Al-Badiah region in the three governorates which comprise 40%S of total area of Syria and include 17% of the total population.

4- Irrigation and Agriculture sector:

- Steppe development in Al-Badiah.
- determining effected regions and create projects to prevent land degradation and rehabilitating it for investment.
- improving irrigation efficiency by using modern irrigation systems.
- protecting water resources from pollution.
- creating firm legislation to protect steppes.
- Integrate the priorities of agriculture research with issues to help sustainability of resources and improve environment.

* The attached tables to the Arabic version show the above point.

II -Poverty reduction strategies paper:

The main aims at the end of tenth five year plan in 2010 are to decrease the ratio of population who live under high line of poverty (about 5.3 millions) to 30.13%, and decrease the ratio of population who live in extreme poverty (about 2 million) from 11.39 % in 2004 to 7.8 % in 2010, then to reach 7.13% in 2015.

In addition, the report determine eight directions and properties related to the mutation in poverty rang and distribution in Syria from 1996 – 2004.

*for more details refer to the Arabic version of the report.

III - National strategy for sustainable development:

The National Strategy is being finalized, however the framework of the strategy include the following themes:

- Poverty reduction and decrease of unemployment.
- Strengthen rational utilization.
- Development of education sector.
- Sustainable use of land resources.
- Sustainable management of water resources.
- Participate of the private sector.
- Agriculture and rural development.
- Sustainable tourism.

IV- Environmental action plans:

- National environmental action plan.
- National plan to combat desertification.
- National plan of biodiversity.
- Agricultural policies.

V- National Agenda of 21st Century:

The Arabic version of the report and the previous report for 2002 has more details.

4 - Institutional arrangements taken to implement the convention, including legislative and institutional frame or arrangement, linkages and coordination faces with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies:

- National action plan as a part of the national economic and social plans and development protection:

According to the strategies and plans, the national action plan to combat desertification is integrated with other national plan for social development and environment protection and it considered as a part of it. The tenth-five-year-plan tried to enhance the participation of the private sector and filling the gaps between sustainable development policies and undertaking one (strategy of poverty reduction, education strategy, and water legislation).

According to the proposal of State Planning commission, projects plan were adopted by the Economic Committee of the Cabinet to be presented to the donors for funding and to be considered as a priority in the government's plans and join some of these projects of Al Badiah and basins programs in the tenth five yearly plans (2006-2010).

- achieved linkages with sub-regional and regional programs:

- Establishment and functional national coordination body:

National coordination body (NCB) is linked to the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, chaired by the Minister of Local Administration and Environment. The NCB plays an important role in enhancing the sustainable administration of lands within the program frameworks, as it represents all concerned bodies in combat desertification. All members of NCB have all rights to get all information and data and provide it to the related focal points and using all techniques to deliver information.

- Institutional framework for coherent and functional desertification control:

The implementation of national plan to combat desertification and carrying out items of the convention haven't been implemented with out active institutional framework. The framework consists of the following:

- 1) Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development Council.
- 2) Ministry of Local Administration and Environment.
- 3) State Planning Commission.
- 4) Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform.
- 5) Ministry of Irrigation.
- 6) Ministry of Housing and Construction.
- 7) Ministry of Information.
- 8) Educational Institutions and Research Centers.
- 9) Public Organizations.
- 10) Non-governmental Organizations.

There are additional important six points in activating the implementation of the national action plan which weren't included in the previous report:

- Rename the Environmental Protection Council to Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development Council.
- Allegation of Environmental Affairs and Ministry of Local Administration to became Ministry of Local Administration and Environment.
- Participating of State Planning Commission strongly in determining the priorities of social and economic development and sustainable development, focused on poverty issue and link it with land degradation and combat desertification.
- Establishing many of non-governmental organizations related to environment and sustainable development and including land degradation & combat desertification in its priorities.
- Include some programs of national plan to combat desertification in the tenth five yearly plan (2006- 2010) and linkage plans with indicators.
- Establishing the Eastern Region Development Committee (at the ministerial level).

- Coherent and scientific legal and regulatory frame:

The laws and legislations which were issued during the last few years are considered an important frame in carrying out the national action plan to combat desertification:

- Environmental law number (50) issued in 8\7\2002.
- Forest law number (7) issued in 20\6\1994 .and recent amendments.
- Water legislation law number (31) issued in 16\11\2005.
- Transformation to modern irrigation decree number (91) in 2005.

These laws aimed to conserve soil, mitigate land degradation, and combat desertification. In this context we have to support what was included in the tenth five-year plan (2006-2010). The projects and the mainstreams and considered natural resources management, especially soil & water, the main phase of economic transmutation and social economy and enhancing the role of local communities and local authorities in making decisions related to land degradation and combat desertification and enforcement of the local administration law in achieving the decentralization .

5 - Participatory process in supporting the preparing and implementing the action programs, particularly processes concerning the civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations:

- Active participation of relevant sectors in defining national priorities:
Relevant institutions to combat desertification contributed directly in preparing and supporting the implementation of national action program in all fields.

Many awareness activities were executed in many subjects such as:

- 1) Increased the danger due to over utilization of the ecological and sustainable systems with the frame of drastic climatic phenomena.
- 2) Advocate the participation in the rural development and considering this as an important issue in poverty reduction.
- 3) Confirming the economic and social results of the immigration as a result of land degradation and poverty.
- 4) Combating land degradation is less cost than the bad obstacles of desertification.
- 5) Exchanging expertise, and distribution of successful projects.

6- Consultative process to support the preparation and implementation of national action programs and partnership agreements with forth-going country parties and other related entities, particularly mobilization and coordination both of national and international resources .

- Effective support from international partners for cooperation:

Many important steps were executed to insure the participation of international partners in the financial support to execute the national plan to combat desertification, such as:

- 1) Approval of Economic Committee which chaired by the prime minister to request the donors particularly the German side in financial support of the plan program and reducing some debts, on the other side implementing the programs by the Syrian Government and follow up by the German side .
- 2) Arranging a round table meeting for the donors represented by many countries such as (Canada, Switzerland, France, Finland, Japan, Holland, and Kuwait) and many Banks and international supporting organizations.
- 3) A Plan was developed and a pilot project in the affected area was implemented with the support of the UNDP and Dry land Developing Center (DDC).
- 4) The Global Mechanism of the Convention contributed to the financial support to arrange another meeting for the donors and mobilizing support for the national action plan program.
- 5) A draft project was prepared in cooperation with GEF for the Eastern Region in Syria which aims mainly poverty alleviation and developing affected areas. Approval of this project was in condition with the connection point of the UNCCD.
- 6) The State Planning Commission is the interdependent is the party to coordinate efforts with donating parties in cooperation of the focal point.

7 - Procedures taken or planned within the frame of national action programs included that aims to improve the economic

environment and conserve natural resources and encourage its sustainable use, and to rehabilitate degraded land, and enhancing knowledge related to combating desertification and drought mitigation.

- Adequate diagnosis of past experiences:

The process of Combating desertification has attracted a great attention due to the importance of land resources in Syria. All priorities of relevant plans and strategies are land resources and its sustainable management. this was reflected positively in the socio-economic five-year plans, particularly the tenth five- year plan (2006-2010). During the ninth-year plan (2001-2005) many actions related to combat desertification were implemented by relevant ministries.

- Forestation, deteriorated areas rehabilitation and expansion of the rehabilitated project's areas.
- Expansion of the grazing protectorates, from (750000) hectares in the previous report to 970000 hectares...
- Focusing on natural resources administration.

Establishing modern irrigation projects and many developing projects, and preparing important strategies related to resources management such as poverty strategy, human development (education) which were included in the tenth five year plan (Arabic attachment No2) and agreement of economic committee to present the programs included in the national action plan to combat desertification, to the donors to find additional opportunities for funding and implementation. It is necessary to point out that data for land degradation and to combat desertification needs a lot of work to be updated.

- Technical programs and integrated programs to combat desertification process:

Many projects are implemented in Syria, all are related to national resources management, especially decrease land degradation and combat desertification which comply with the principles of UNCCD and was reflected in the NAP through what were implemented by the ministries and stakeholders.

- **Projects implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian reform :**
 1. Forests development.

2. Integrated Development Project in Al-Badiah.
3. Drilling and equipping wells in Al-Badiah.
4. Development of Al-Badiah.
5. Directorate of range development and national protectorates areas.
6. Survey of natural and agricultural resources in Syria by using remote sensing technique and GIS.
7. Green Belt Project around Deir Elzour.
8. Forest protection and combat fire.
9. Forest development.
10. Rural development in Jabal Al Huss.
11. Transmutation to modern irrigation.
12. Coastal and Middle Region Agricultural Development.

• **Projects implemented by Ministry of Irrigation:**

1. Project of Flood Treatment and Rehabilitation of Al seha plain.
2. Project of Second priority Rehabilitation in southern Aleppo plains.
3. Al Rasafa Basin rehabilitation project (Al rakka Governorate – Eastern Region).
4. Third phase of the Eastern Al Balikh Rehabilitation project (Al rakka governorate – Eastern region).
5. Rehabilitation project in Al journea plains.
6. Project of Rehabilitation eight sector of lower Euphrates (Deir El Zour mohafathat- Eastern Region).
7. Project of Rehabilitation of lands near al Khabour River (Deir El Zour mohafathat- eastern region).
8. Project of Rehabilitation first region rest of lower Euphrates (Deir El Zour mohafathat- Eastern Region).
9. Modern Irrigation Fund.

* (more details are included in the Arabic version of the report)

- Effectiveness of measures of local capacity building:

Syria is currently following a modern economic system. Through the social market economic system which depends on decentralization, the local authorities were given wide validities to administrate institutions and local activities in all fields as training the local and non-governmental organizations in accordance with plans and strategies which have been approved.

8 - Financial allocations from national budgets in support of implementation as well as financial assistance and technical cooperation including their inflows, and processes to identify their requirements, funding, priorities.

- Adopted financial mechanism:

The Syrian Government is committed to provide financial support for the projects related to combat desertification and natural resources conservation. Allocating financial support mechanism is within plans of concerned ministries and commissions to combat desertification and land degradation. The required funds allocated after the approval of State Planning Commission and approved by the government, then it allocated on the plan's years in January of every year then transferred to the concerned implementing sectors.

The State Planning Commission contacts the donating international organizations to get additional financial opportunities. For example, GEF will finance a project in the eastern region aiming at combating desertification:

- Project of Sustainable Integrated Administration in Eastern Region:

The Initial document of the project aims at sustainable integrated administration for lands in eastern region (Al Badiah and the Euphrates Basin), and to prepare final project and implement for eight years to review the problems of land degradation and desertification and soil salinity. The facility Initial document allocated finance as follow:

- Global Environment Facility (GEF) contribution 350000 \$
- Dry Land Development Center (DDC) contribution 25000 \$
- UNDP contribution 30000 \$
- The Syrian Government contribution. 132000 \$
- United Arab Emirate contribution. 2500 \$

The Final document of the project will be financed by:

GEF/ 4.5/ million \$ and the Syrian Government / 10 /million \$

The Syrian Government is encouraging investments in dry lands through income generating projects as small donations and revolving funds.

-Finance of the National Action Program:

Some projects of National Action Plan to combat desertification (which were changed to programs) were included in the economic and social five-year plans. The Syrian Government allocated a huge amount of money to carry out the activities as it was illustrated in the report. The total amount to carry out the projects and activities included in the tenth- five-year plan is (107,506,700,000)Syrian Pounds. In addition, some projects are financed by external resources or as donations, but this kind of projects is limited and the participation of Global Mechanism and external finance resources do not correspond with what is allocated by the Syrian Government for projects of combating desertification (as it was illustrated in the Arabic version of the report.

Technical cooperation developed:

The Syrian Government decided to use irrigation technology, and allocated 73.8 billion Syrian pounds, in addition to sub regional cooperation by UNDP office in Western Asia.

Syria is hosting the Thematic Program Network Management for Agricultural Use. However, Syria did not get any technical cooperation in the field of combating desertification yet.

9 - Review of benchmarks and indicators to measure progress and assessment:

Operational mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation such as:

- using remote sensing and GIS (index 4)
- Using drought and early warning strategy (index 5)

There isn't any special observatory system to study & evaluate national action program, even though many suggested projects in the program become a part of social and economic of tenth five-year plan (2006-2010) which will be followed up and evaluated.

10 -Newly introduced indicators, according to decisio10/m a-5:

- **Scientific and technical desertification control activities:**

The most important technique used in the field of combating desertification are using transmutation to modern irrigation project in addition to using hollows to collect water and use it for animals and water harvesting, which include the net work of water resources management for agricultural use.

- Implementation of the recommendation of the Science and Technology Committee:

Many activities and recommendations of Science and Technology Committee are used in the field of combating desertification and mitigate drought impacts. For example, the institutional side of implementing the Convention especially the connection between desertification, poverty and education which was focused in the tenth five-year plan, in addition to what was included in the NAP such as using and improving traditional knowledge, using early warning system for drought controlling within the national drought strategy in addition to other activities of environmental capacity assessment project (Assessment of the UNCCD and UNCBD and UNFCCC), training, using modern technologies (Remote Sensing and GIS).

* For more details, refer to the projects, activities, and plans which were included in the report.