

Summary of the UAE National Action Report for Implementing the UNCCD as presented to COP4 2000

Introduction:

Taking into consideration that the UAE is located within the arid west continent desert belt, the environment (as that of many of the arid and semi arid environments in the world) is highly sensitive. The sensitivity is attributed to the delicate balance between various natural systems arid components such as climate, water resources, soil, and vegetation, and biodiversity. Accordingly its exposure to the impacts of aridity and desertification is considered as a reoccurring phenomenon.

The UAE and since its establishment has not spared efforts to conserve its environment, develop natural resources on sustainable bases and combat desertification. The UAE considered this as one of its development pillars and thus was able to accomplish great achievement in the various fields related to the environment and desertification. In relatively short time, these achievements would not have been possible without the wise policies arid the urgency that His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Nahyan, has placed on dealing with the environmental issues. His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan A1 Nahyan, the president of the UAE highlighted this interest in his message to the Earth Summit in 1992, as well as in the UAE country report to the UNCCD conference of the parties in 1997.

The establishment of the Federal Environmental Agency (FEA) in 1993 reconfirmed the UAE interests in the environment and was a major step towards consolidating the role of the federal government in addressing environmental concerns in the country. This included the preparation of the National Environmental Strategy and the National Environmental Action Plan and the National Action Plan to Combat Desertification (Draft). The objectives, scope and contents undertaken by the FEA are summarized below:

I. The Nations! Strategy and the National Plans for the Environment and Combating Desertification

1. Part One: Priorities For Environmental Action (National Agenda 21):

The National Environments! Strategy, and the National Environmental Action Plan for the UAE were developed in the context of the National Policies for Conservation, sustainable development of natural resources, combating desertification and fulfilling the commitments of Agenda 21. UNDP and UN

ESCWA cooperated with the FEA to develop the National Environmental Strategy and the Environmental Action Plan. The first report completed in December 1998 represents an integration of the sectoral reports prepared by ten sectoral work groups that addressed environmental aspects and development in the UAE. The report is divided into six chapters as follows: a. UAE, Geographical characteristics. b. Elements of Sustainable development. c.

Elements for planning of Environmental National Strategy and National Environmental Action Plan,

d. The major environmental issues in the UAE.

e. Environmental capacity-building in the UAE.

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2. Part Two: The Development of the National Environmental Strategy

The National Environmental Strategy which was completed in December 1999 include strategies that were developed by the ten sectoral groups representing various environmental and developmental aspects in UAE. These sectoral strategies are based on priorities identified by the sectoral groups in the first report, which are:

? Availability of fresh water resources;

Combating pollution (water, air, waste);

Conserving the marine environment;

Conserving the urban environment;

a Conserving terrestrial resources, and biodiversity.

The sectoral strategies are synthesised into a National Environmental Strategy reflecting objectives and policies and comprising 7 chapters::

Chapter 1: Introduction, the environment characteristics and the environment stresses in the UAE.

Chapter 2: National Environmental Strategy for Water Resources.

Chapter 3: National Environmental Strategy for reducing air and water pollution problems.

Chapter 4: National Environmental Strategy for Problems of marine environment.

Chapter 5: National Environmental Strategy for Problems of urban environment.

Chapter 6: National Environmental Strategy for land resources degradation and biodiversity.

Chapter 7: National Environmental Strategy for capacities and awareness.

It is obvious that all the strategies described above are related to desertification in one way or another but more specifically in (Chapter 6).

3. Part Three: The Draft National Action Plan to Combat Desertification in the UAE:

The UAE in cooperation with UNEP/ROWA and ESCWA prepared a draft National Action Plan to combat desertification. The plan was completed by the end of 1995, and has not been

implemented hoping to integrate it with the National Environmental Strategy and the Environmental Action Plan on completion. Integrating the three programs ensures addressing environmental issues in a balanced and comprehensive manner.

The plan comprises the following elements:

Chapter (1): Listing of the natural resources and their potentials.

Chapter (2): The socio-economic set up.

Chapter (3): Past and present efforts in combating desertification.

Chapter (4): Includes the "National Action Plan for Combating Desertification". Eight programs were identified in the strategy:

a. Monitoring and assessment;

b. Water resource management;

c. Public awareness and participation

d. Rational agriculture;

e. Security against drought;

f. Promoting the scientific and technological capabilities;

g. Promoting national capacity building programs; h. Consolidating federal, regional and international cooperation.

Chapter (5) Capacity building.

Chapter (6): Identification of priority short-term (5 years) programs during 1994-1999 which amount to about 27 projects.

II. The National agency responsible for implementing the agreement:

The UAE has assigned FEA by a ministerial decree No. 41452 for the year 1997 to follow up the implementation of the UNCCD at the federal, sub-regional and international levels. The UAE has joined the UNCCD in 21.10.1999 and became a member in 19.01.1999. Work is ongoing to institute a National Committee, formed by representatives of around twenty ministries and other national and private organizations concerned with desertification. This National Committee will follow up implementation of the Convention and prepare a national strategy and action plan to combat desertification in accordance with the National Environmental Strategy and the Asia Annex of the Convention.

III. The Legal and Legislative Frame-work for Protection of the Environment:

In absence of a Federal Environmental Act, UAE issued Law No. 24 concerning Environmental Protection and Development in 1999. It includes nine chapters concerned with protection and conservation of renewable natural resources such as water, soil, and natural reservation. It has 101 articles addressing the following objectives:

1. Protection of the environment and conservation of its quality and natural balance.
2. Combating pollution in all forms, and avoiding any damage or long term impacts as a result of any economic, agricultural, industrial urban development programs intended to raise the standard of living and promoting cooperation between the Federal Environmental Agency and other governmental organizations concerned with the protection, and conservation of environmental and consolidating environmental awareness and pollution combating principles.
3. Developing natural resources and sustaining biodiversity in the UAF through utilization in the most efficient and sustainable manner to the benefit of present and future generations.
4. Protection of human health, other living creatures from impacts related to activities and actions that are damaging to the environment.
5. Protection of the environment of the UAE from impacts of activities carried out beyond the borders of the UAE.
6. Implementing provisions in approved international and regional agreements related to environmental protection, combating pollution and conservation of natural resources.

IV institutional Frame-work to conserve the environment:

The organizational structure suggested for FEA is composed of several directorates made of sections among which is the agricultural activity and combating desertification section. Similar units are also operating at the state level, reflecting the interest of the country in conserving the natural resources and combating desertification. In order to provide adequate coverage, the government actually pursues capacity building through local training programs and external scholarships for obtaining higher degrees in areas relevant to combating desertification.

V. Integration of Combating Desertification programs into the National Environmental Strategy:

At the implementation level; UAE interest in Combating Desertification is highlighted in the first and second parts of the National Environmental Strategy. In addition, the chapter that is related to agriculture and land resources includes objectives, policies and measures that are needed to conserve the land resources and to combat desertification. The activities of the National Environment Strategy are being developed to including activities related to combating desertification and reducing the impact of aridity. Once the National Action

I. Sub-regional, regional and international cooperation in combating desertification:

The UAE has participated in the sub-regional and regional meetings, e.g. The Sub-regional Action Plan meetings for West Asia as well as the regional meetings for Asia. The regional and sub-regional programs have emphasized the need to harmonize their programs with the goals of National Action Plans that include monitoring and assessment of desertification, early warning for drought and desertification, water resource management, capacity building, developing rangelands and forests, and fixation of sand dunes, ... etc.

At the national level, a survey of the coastal area of the UAE was conducted using field surveys. The UAE is also participating with the GCC in preparation of a draft project to survey and evaluate rangelands and forests in these countries. UAE is also actively participating in the

Steering Committee to Combat Desertification of CAMRE. The committee in cooperation with subregional and regional organizations was able to implement several projects in the framework of the program for Combating Desertification and Mitigation of Drought effects. The committee will also link national programs with subregional and regional programs to benefit from the available capabilities and expertise.

II **Activities relevant to Combating Desertification that have been implemented:**

The main activities relevant to combating desertification and conservation of natural resources includes:

Developing laws and regulations relevant to conservation and sustainable management of the environment and renewable **natural** resources,

Preparation of the National Atlas that includes geographical and geological general information.

Conducting many surveys on ground-water resources.

Surveying the number of A-flaj and identifying the quantity of their water productivity.

Developing wastewater treatment plants with an annual productional capacity of 108 million cubic meters.

The afforestation areas have been developed to reach 300,000 Dunms,

Establishment of several natural reservations on islands and remote desert areas.

Dubai, Al Ain, Shwjah and Abu Dhabi. Municipalities have prepared land use maps **defining agricultural, urban and public areas.**

Agricultural policies in the UAE have been geared to encourage rational use of natural resources and achieving the highest level of yields. Also there is a common agricultural policy for WC which was drawn in 1984 and amended in 1999.

A National Committee will be formed to carryout the Action Programs to combat desertification. However, the need arises both at UAE and GCC levels for technical assistance from donors and international organizations. However, UAE intends to include these technical needs within programs prepared for combating desertification,