

Sustainable development

The Convention opens an important new phase in the battle against desertification, but it is just a beginning. In particular, governments are regularly reviewing the action programmes. They also focus on awareness-raising, education and training, in both developing and developed countries.

Desertification can be reversed only if far-reaching changes are made in local and international behavior. Step by step, these changes will ultimately lead to sustainable land use and food security for a growing world population. Combating desertification, then, is really just part of a much broader objective: the sustainable development of countries affected by drought and desertification.

For more information, please contact:

Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Haus Carstanjen
Martin-Luther-King-Strasse 8
D- 53175 Bonn, Germany
tel.: (49-228) 815-28 00
fax: (49-228) 815- 28 99
e-mail: secretariat@unccd.int

Web home page: www.unccd.int



UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

IN THOSE COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING SERIOUS
DROUGHT AND/OR DESERTIFICATION
PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA



The problem of land degradation

Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. It is caused primarily by human activities and climatic variations.

Desertification does not refer to the expansion of existing deserts. It occurs because dryland ecosystems, which cover over one third of the world's land area, are extremely vulnerable to over-exploitation and inappropriate land use. Poverty, political instability, deforestation, over-grazing and bad irrigation practices can all undermine the productivity of the land.

Over 250 million people are directly affected by desertification, and about one billion people in over one hundred countries are at risk. These people include many of the world's poorest, most marginalized and politically weak citizens.

An innovative solution

Combating desertification is essential to ensuring the long-term productivity of inhabited drylands. Unfortunately, past efforts have too often failed, and around the world the problem of land degradation continues to worsen.

Recognizing the need for a fresh approach, 191 governments had joined the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification as at September 2005. This Convention aims to promote effective action through innovative lo-

cal programmes and supportive international partnerships.

The treaty acknowledges that the struggle to protect drylands will be a long one - there will be no quick fix. This is because the causes of desertification are many and complex, ranging from international trade patterns to unsustainable land management practices. Real and difficult changes will have to be made, at both the international and the local level.

National action programmes ...

Countries affected by desertification are implementing the Convention by developing and carrying out national, subregional, and regional action programmes. Criteria for preparing these programmes are detailed in the treaty's five "regional implementation annexes": Africa (considered a priority because that is where desertification is most severe), Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Northern Mediterranean, and Central and Eastern Europe.

Drawing on past lessons, the Convention states that these programmes must adopt a democratic, bottom-up approach. They should emphasize popular participation and the creation of an "enabling environment" designed to enable local people to reverse land degradation through self-help.

Of course, governments remain responsible for creating this enabling environment. They must make politically sensitive changes, such as decentralizing authority, improving land tenure

systems, and empowering women, farmers and pastoralists.

They should also permit non-governmental organizations to play a strong role in preparing and implementing the action programmes.

In contrast to many past efforts, these action programmes are to be fully integrated into other national policies for sustainable development. They should be flexible and adopted to changed circumstances.

... and partnership agreements

The Convention's action programmes are being developed through consultations among affected countries, donors, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. This process will improve coordination and channel development assistance to where it can be most effective. It will also produce partnership agreements that spell out the respective contributions of affected states, donor states and international organizations.

Developed countries are expected to encourage the mobilization of substantial funding for the action programmes.

They should also promote access to appropriate technologies, knowledge and know-how.

The need for coordination among donors and recipients is stressed because each programme's various activities need to be complementary and mutually reinforcing.