

Decision 8/COP.5

World Summit on Sustainable Development

The Conference of the Parties,

Convinced that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) should be an excellent opportunity to mobilize more political will and resources to promote the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD),

Deeply concerned that, despite many successful and continuing efforts of the international community since the entry into force of the Convention and the fact that some progress has been made, desertification worldwide is worsening,

Recalling General Assembly Resolution 55/199 on the ten-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development which invited, *inter alia*, conventions related to the conference to participate fully in the ten-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21,

Recalling also that Chapter 12 of Agenda 21 identified combating desertification as one of the strategic tasks in the field of environment and sustainable development,

1. *Decides* to submit to the World Summit on Sustainable Development through the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, for consideration, the Chairman's summary of the Ministerial and High-Level Interactive Dialogue sessions of the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD on "Addressing the poverty-environment nexus through timely and effective implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification" which is annexed to the report of the Conference of the Parties and reproduced below;

2. *Invites* the Executive Secretary to submit to the WSSD through the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, for consideration, decision 3/COP.5 on the Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group for the in-depth review and analysis of reports submitted at the third and fourth sessions of the Conference of the Parties, and in particular the conclusions and recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group annexed thereto;

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to continue to participate actively in the preparatory process for the WSSD, and in the Summit itself, with a view to ensuring that the UNCCD goals and objectives, particularly those relating to poverty eradication and sustainable development, are duly reflected in its outcome, and to report to the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties accordingly;

4. *Invites* the WSSD to take into account in the course of its deliberations the challenges of and opportunities in combating desertification, controlling land degradation and mitigating the effects of drought in affected countries, including those relating to financial resources, with a view to renewing political commitments and achieving sustainable development, taking into consideration the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities;

5. *Encourages* Governments to involve UNCCD national focal points in the WSSD process, and non-governmental organizations to participate in that process, and invites developed countries to provide support to that end through appropriate channels.

*11th plenary meeting
12 October 2001*

Annex

PRESIDENT'S SUMMARY

**MINISTERIAL AND HIGH-LEVEL INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE SESSIONS
Monday and Tuesday, 8-9 October 2001**

Introduction

Two High-Level Open Dialogue sessions were held during the fifth Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). One was an informal meeting at Ministerial level, the other, an open dialogue for all high-level representatives within the formal sessions of the Conference's special segment. The intention of these meetings was to encourage the involvement of high-level participants in order to elicit critical ideas and active dialogue, and to ensure that these high-level representatives had an opportunity to voice their concerns about the drylands at this last meeting of the COP prior to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in September 2002.

As an innovative experiment, these meetings were a success and many Parties have since expressed their satisfaction with the process; the Open Dialogue sessions of the special segment saw active engagement by some 40-50 speakers in frank discussion about critical issues facing the drylands. Parties may therefore wish to explore with the secretariat options for future sessions of this nature, perhaps even further refining and targeting the discussions in order to explore and advance specific agreed issues.

Participants are thanked for their contributions to this exchange; it is hoped that the following synthesis of the debate captures the key issues and themes which arose, and challenges all to continue this discussion in the various forums in which they will engage in the processes leading up to Johannesburg.

Context

Participants were challenged to identify what they believe to be the key issues in addressing the relationship between desertification, or land degradation, and poverty. They were asked to share their experiences on best practice - what works and what does not, to highlight the major impediments to progress, to indicate what they consider to be the priority actions that could be taken by affected country governments, donor organizations and countries, and affected populations, and to explore the potential contribution that can be made by the UNCCD as an instrument for poverty reduction, especially by capitalizing on the synergism amongst the multilateral environmental agreements.

Discussion: Overarching Challenges that emerged

It was confirmed by all that desertification is linked to poverty. Our understanding of desertification has evolved from a focus on the bio-physical aspects that lead to land degradation to a more comprehensive perspective which sees desertification to be clearly a developmental as well as an environmental issue. In identifying concrete actions for addressing desertification, participants in the discussion emphasized the need for actors to take into account the underlying socio-economic causes and constraints that create the conditions of poverty.

It was argued that desertification is both a primary cause and a consequence in the environment/poverty nexus. Losses of soils and water resources push marginal populations into a vicious spiral of increasing demands on scarcer natural resources; efforts to combat desertification should be targeted at breaking this cycle. They must be inter-organizational and multi-sectoral; building UNCCD objectives into poverty-reduction strategies would help in this regard. And finally, actions must achieve economies of scale and must provide return on investment.

Partnership is of key importance, between donors and developing countries, amongst donors, and with groups in civil society.

It was noted that at the national level the kind of cooperative, multi-sectoral approach which is required in order to address the desertification/poverty nexus with real results is at present a real challenge to the capacities of national governments. One idea which was debated was the possible need to strengthen the advocacy role and political profile of Ministries of the Environment within Parties' respective governments. It was also argued, on the other hand, that the problem was not so much a question of Ministerial weight, but rather one of constraints in the overall machinery of development. For example, the management and articulation of *planning* instruments for development, as negotiated by donor countries in partnership with recipient governments, tend to concentrate too much on the social sectors. The focus is poverty reduction, while relevant related issues such as the environment, which also require attention, are sometimes ignored. There is clearly a role for both donors and affected developing countries in seeking ways to raise the importance of the environment on the development agenda.

The generation of income was also seen as of prime importance in addressing the poverty-desertification-poverty cycle. It was argued that the promotion of alternative livelihoods could deliver results under the twin objectives of reducing poverty and combating desertification. In the context of rural agricultural economies, agricultural production and livelihood are closely entwined, and this relates to problems of food security, markets, agricultural trade and the overall macro-economic policy context. For example, policy decisions to centralize land holdings and invest in monoculture for export crops can result in increased land degradation, unstable pricing and declining livelihoods. Related environmental concerns, including chemical residue from inappropriate pesticide and fertilizer use only serve to exacerbate the problem.

Even when sustainable investments in agricultural production can be undertaken, they are unlikely to be successful if the basic infrastructure and enabling environment are not in place. Participants mentioned a variety of constraints including low market competitiveness, limited access to credit and investment and poor infrastructure, particularly roads to markets, access to water, or alternative energy supplies (to fuel wood). Provision of these are costly and long-term commitments.

In this regard, several participants raised the need for adequate financial assistance to be provided to affected developing countries to enable them to carry out the necessary work. Furthermore, support for capacity-building and the transfer of technology, both North-South and South-South, was a major requirement.

Another issue which featured prominently in many of the interventions during the special segment was the matter of land tenure and entitlement to productive resources. Many delegates shared their experience and knowledge of this subject. Suggestions were made ranging from advocating modern privatized land use systems through to the benefits of more traditional, community ownership practices. While no single system was identified as superior, it was clear from the discussion that this was a topic of great interest and one upon which the special segment was interested in engaging. The Convention may wish to explore this issue in greater detail.

While there was no consensus on this matter, it was clear that the topic of access and rights to land and secure livelihood is at the heart of the problem. Without the appropriate systems in place, affected people have no option but to migrate in times of distress and/or to resort to unsustainable agricultural practices. Unfortunately, as one participant noted, population movement to urban centres is not a solution and only serves to degrade peri-urban centres while contributing to urban poverty.

Population pressure in both the rural and urban contexts was an underlying issue which surfaced during the discussion. An interesting perspective was presented by one participant who noted that the real problem is not so much one of the numbers of people, but rather the nature of the impact they make. The concern therefore must be more on what these populations are doing, or not doing, vis-à-vis sustainable land use and management. Behaviour seems key.

In keeping with this conclusion, many participants indicated that solutions can be found only if we direct action to assisting the poor. However, these "pro-poor" solutions cannot be imposed. Nor is it a question of processes - consultation, participation, and so on - but rather one of empowerment. Giving affected people the means and autonomy to initiate, implement and take responsibility for their own processes of change; this is particularly true in the case of the most vulnerable groups of affected people. Further, the role of women was highlighted within the context of empowerment, and emphasized as a priority for attention, given the role that women play. Closely related to this call for empowerment are the notions of democratization and decentralization. Speakers identified trends which they were observing towards the increased participation of civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and cooperatives, and the diffusion of decision-making and financial decision-making to affected local areas.

Also crucial to the discussion on behavioural change was the emphasis placed by various speakers on improving education and training. A broad spectrum of these kinds of needs was described, ranging from environmental education at primary school level, through capacity-building at the grassroots level, extension and vocational training in land and water use and enhanced scientific research capacity and application, to training for national decision-makers, training in economic valuation (in terms of economic assessment of desertification impacts), training of experts in dispute settlement, and even training for negotiators.

In terms of programme activity, it was observed that the very nature of interventions are changing as there is an increasing shift from a project to a programme means of delivery. Various contributors described their successful programmes, many of which featured ecosystem or watershed approaches (for example at the catchment level), transboundary actions, and so on. Others reflected on specific programme linkages which they have been trying to strengthen between desertification and climate change and/or biological diversity.

This notion of harmonization of multilateral environmental agreements and their effective inclusion into poverty reduction strategies was a recurrent theme during discussions. Unfortunately, many participants reflected that structuring of environmental issues through international conventions has led to the development of separate instruments, with distinct but parallel processes for engagement. Consequently, much work needs to be done to harness the synergies between the Conventions.

The need for policy coherence was also underlined. Again the nature of discussion during this special segment varied greatly. Some countries argued forcefully that what was needed was effective developing country leadership, while others pointed out that the donor community must recognize that their policy pressures and shorter-term planning cycles do not necessarily contribute to the longed-for integration. Rather there was recognition that donors must explore ways in which to engage in long-term partnership approaches, working with developing countries toward coordination and policy coherence.

And yet there is a danger, as another speaker noted, of overloading the policy agenda. The desire to be coherent and integrative may be immobilizing us completely. Perhaps the strongest message which was heard at the High-Level discussion was the need for action now.

Avenues towards further progress

The following are some key points from the discussion, which the COP may be interested in pursuing through further discussion:

- Poverty and desertification are inextricably linked.
- The reduction of poverty should be the overriding strategy that drives individual policy frameworks.
- UNCCD objectives should be built into poverty reduction strategies.
- The provision of adequate financing and support for technology transfer and capacity-building is essential.
- Simple, practical indicators, such as the amount of forest lost, land degraded or water available will help us to measure both our progress in the drylands and our overall success in addressing poverty.
- Policy coherence at all levels must be achieved on the basis of genuine partnership and consensus. Productive partnerships are the key to success.
- Priority must be given to triggering resource and income generation for local populations.
- Model or pilot projects could be used to illustrate lessons learnt and best practices for sustainable livelihood systems in the drylands.
- Effective use and deployment of existing resources implies bringing multilateral environment agreements into the mainstream of poverty reduction strategies.
- Donors should work with developing countries to support policy coherence with a view to assisting countries to incorporate the Convention into their strategic development frameworks.
- Work must be done to encourage the creation and/or strengthening of the necessary enabling environments (infrastructure, legal, institutional, etc.) which are preconditions to the effective implementation of this Convention.
- Environmental education is fundamental; this is in addition to broader needs relating to education, training, and capacity-building which require further support.
- Social and communal processes must be fostered through investments for equitable resource allocation, notably with regard to water.
- Local populations must be empowered to become capable of creating their own sustainable development.
- The role of civil society (NGOs, CBOs, cooperatives, etc.) as a key ally of government in the development process must be recognized and supported.