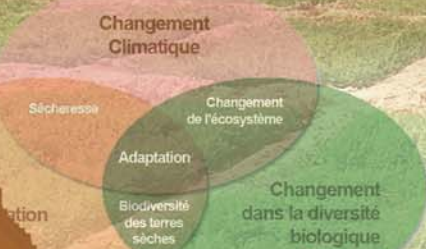


ANOTHER STEP FORWARDS IN FIGHTING DESERTIFICATION:

for a regional community programme
in the circum-Sahara



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(AMU, ECOWAS/CILSS, CEN-SAD, OSS)

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INTRODUCTION

The Sahara and the western and eastern Sahel, which together make up the circum-Saharan space, are among the vulnerable regions of the world most affected by drought and desertification.

Following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was signed in Paris in 1994. It raised great expectations, particularly in Africa, and generated significant efforts in the circum-Saharan space. Ten years later, enthusiasm has clearly waned. The strong linkages which the Convention made between desertification, community participation and development have not led to the level of action required to meet the challenge. Given this, the countries concerned need to increase their efforts to strengthen the implementation of the Convention. They should take the lead in the fight against desertification at all levels, and become a significant creative force for proposals and/or action.

Based on this observation, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) has demonstrated its strong political determination to reinvigorate an effective fight against desertification in the region. It intends to develop a shared vision and a common programme based on South-South partnership and cooperation, in particular with the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Economic Community of West African States/Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel (ECOWAS/CILSS) and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in East Africa. The Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) whose experience in, and support for, implementation of the Convention span more than ten years of serving the region, its sub-regions and their States-has offered to develop a regional community programme to fight desertification, with the intention of reinforcing cooperation and sustainable development.

Given these converging factors, the time seemed ripe to consider regional cooperation as a valuable way of fighting desertification. For the purposes of this document, the scale studied covers the whole of the circum-Saharan space, including three distinct regions covered by the Convention. Indeed, three regional organisations with a mandate of economic integration were appointed to implement the Convention on the sub-regional level: AMU for North Africa, and more specifically the Maghreb countries, CILSS and ECOWAS for West Africa and IGAD for East Africa. Each of these organisations drew up and validated a sub-regional action programme (SRAP) to fight desertification, and they were submitted to the United Nations in 1999.

A detailed analysis of these three SRAPs, and their similarities and their differences, is of fundamental importance to any inter-regional deliberations on the topic. Our work in this document is based mostly on this analysis. It goes on to review the current state of affairs, first emphasizing achievements related to the implementation of the Convention and the fight against desertification in its widest meaning in the region, and then highlighting constraints and difficulties. The main challenges are identified, along with current policy trends. These provide the context for suggestions for action in a regional community programme for fighting desertification, described in detail in the fourth and final section - fighting desertification at the regional level.

1

Fighting against desertification at the regional level

The crisis of confidence which the Convention is facing at the international level is fuelled by a North-South divide. The institutional framework supporting the Convention is presently subject to considerable debate and the outlook for the next few years is not clear. This crisis at the international level stems from the disappointment of States in the region, a disappointment in fact proportional to the hopes that the Convention had raised.

States are now integrating other priorities in their development programmes and the fight against desertification seems to have lost the innovative, all-inclusive framework which made it attractive at the outside.

The Convention, an international framework, and its implementation by States, in national frameworks, are not the only levels for effectively planning and executing the fight against desertification. This is because desertification and the degradation of land ignore national boundaries and also because tackling such phenomena is as much a regional as a national or international public good. Furthermore, the regional level might be most suitable for addressing some causes or mitigating some consequences of desertification.

1.1- Benefits of (sub-)regional level cooperation

Before discussing the way the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has been implemented, and making proposals for practical action, let us explain why regional cooperation in the fight against desertification is a contemporary imperative.

1.1.1- The strength of a common vision

Given that the Sahara and the western and eastern Sahel are among those vulnerable world regions most affected by drought and desertification, it is important to maximise efforts towards change. A common vision of how desertification affects the circum-Saharan would

influence the international community, strengthen the negotiating power of the circum-Saharan countries and increase their impact at Conferences of the Parties to the UNCCD.

1.1.2- (Sub-)regional cooperation essential



We need to regulate over-grazing and transhumance locally

It is now widely acknowledged that the fight against desertification deals with issues which cannot be suitably resolved on a national level and which require (sub-)regional cooperation. Its lack also too often prevents national policies from being effective. For instance, the fight against acrididae invasions (grasshoppers and locusts) is more effective when conducted as soon as larvae have hatched. Drought warnings can be based on climatic and hydrological data disseminated at the regional level. Issues of overgrazing and transhumance can only be settled at the regional level; the same is true for integrated management of water resources, only effective on the scale of river basins or large aquifer systems which often cross borders. Finally, deforestation can only be stopped by means of rational energy

policies and partnerships between countries, producing energy at the lowest possible cost and making it available to others through, for example, a grid of utility networks for, for instance, electricity and gas.

These are just a few examples but there are many more related to as many corresponding spheres of action. It is undoubtedly in the interest of all to cooperate on these essentially transnational questions.

1.1.3- Transversal issues: regional added value

The effective fight against desertification also requires a complex of structural development actions. They include the development of science and technology, the setting-up of efficient research centres, training of managers on all levels, the introduction of a measurement network regularly monitored by scientists and technicians, the assessment of best practices and their replication and also the sharing of feedback on failures-all of which would benefit from joint efforts around a given space.

Obviously, there are potential economies of scale in these fields. Opportunities for exchange and complementarity between countries, between the North and the South of the Sahara, should be exploited. In addition, science and education should not be restricted to national boundaries.

1.1.4- Consolidation of institutions

Regional cooperation already exists on a broad scale, with many institutions, across countries and regions, active on anti-desertification issues. Their efforts are sometimes too dispersed, with a concomitant waste of energy and resources.

For more effective action, and to avoid duplication and discord between sub-regional organisations, a greater degree of coordination is needed. This could be built around improved harmonies between the regional and sub-regional institutions responsible for the environment and/or natural resources, be it in the context of research, water management or economic integration. An enabling, federating, framework, such as a regional strategy for the fight against desertification, could serve to highlight the missions and roles of each stakeholder, and thus induce considerable efficiencies in cooperation.

1.1.5- A long-term challenge

At the national level, governments, being subject to the distractions of current events and day-to-day management, face multiple priorities and often seek short-term solutions. At the regional level, on the other hand, taking action can be more single-minded, and defined around a few major priorities in the form of guidelines and time-frames integrated into regional or sub-regional policies. For example, in the fight against desertification, which requires integrated, long-term action, results are often only observable over a long period of time - a process facilitated in a regional setting.

1.1.6- Financial aspects: effects of scale

Finally, the sub-regional and regional levels have a fundamental advantage over the national level for the financial implementation of programmes and projects to combat desertification. The act of setting up regional or sub-regional funds for anti-desertification measures may, through a leverage effect, secure additional funding in more significant amounts than would be the case at the national level.

Financial solidarity between States around the Sahara may also be expressed through regional redistribution mechanisms and financial contributions to regional/ sub-regional funds, proportional to the levels of development.

1.2- Analytical summary of SRAPs in the circum-Saharan space

There is a clear interest in cooperation to fight desertification for the whole of the Sahara, without duplication by building upon what already exists. Within the OSS action zone, three regional, economic integration organisations have in fact been appointed as leaders responsible for implementing the Convention on the sub-regional level. These are the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) for North Africa and more specifically the Maghreb countries, the Comité Permanent

Inter-États de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for West Africa and the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) for East Africa. Each of these organisations has drawn up a Sub-Regional Action Plan (SRAP) to fight desertification, submitted to the United Nations in 1999.

Each of the sub-regional institutions has its own identity, objectives and history from which it derives its capacity to federate the sub-regional partners around a common action programme and to implement the programme. We should emphasize that the political determination of Member States to work together is crucial. There has not been the same degree of participation in drafting SRAPs among the three sub-regions. This is due either to a given SRAP process being too political and 'top-down' with only a marginal involvement of NGOs and civil society, or because it is more open and hence more likely to guarantee wider adoption of the regional fight against desertification. The latter is also likely to raise high expectations.

Desertification issues have always been well analysed in the three sub-regions. The many actions and studies already undertaken at country level in previous decades have led to a clear and shared diagnosis. Even though progress has been uneven, the participation process, has also nurtured the understanding that the issues in each States in the three sub-regions have many commonalities and that the sub-region approach is definitely relevant.

Real progress has been achieved during implementation of the SRAPs: the integrated management of water resources has progressed throughout West Africa; the IGAD institutions have been based upon the principles defined by the Convention; and the Arab Maghreb Union has established several well-structured scientific and technical programmes. Projects have indeed been undertaken on regional and sub-regional levels, but in general, a certain lack of coherence has limited the overall effectiveness of the fight against desertification.

In fact, the overall impression is one of a lack of strategy, synergy and complementarity between the different programmes contributing to sustainable development. There has been fragmentation and lack of integration and coordination between the various actions developed. This, as well as the unequal participation and commitment of the countries in sub-regional activities, has led to a State of confusion which overshadows the achievements of the SRAPs.

Given the diverse capacities of the institutions concerned, and varying degrees of cooperation between countries and the sub-region, it is clear that no single picture exists of the relationships between the structuring activities (monitoring networks, data exchange, research, training and capacity building, institutional contributions and strengthening) and the more thematic nature of transborder, or regional projects (such as water, livestock breeding or locust plagues). It would appear that there were too many priorities in the validated SRAPs, and that the institutions responsible for implementation did not have the necessary resources to do so. In this respect, it may be concluded that the most suitable way to fight desertification effectively is to adopt a clear, simple strategy, with a limited number of priorities and a timetable for fulfilling them. That strategy should, in particular, be well-meshed with the actual capacity of the institution in question.



2

Implementation of NAPs and SRAPs: overall review and lessons

In the light of the preceding analysis, the following - initial - evaluation identifies the main achievements and limits of the Convention and the way in which it was implemented at the level of the sub-regions and of signatory States.

2.1- Achievements of NAPs and SRAPs

2.1.1- Widespread mobilisation of stakeholders

Many NAPs and SRAPs are in place, despite some difficulties encountered during implementation. The process of drafting and developing the Plans created an institutional dynamic and an increased awareness on the part of the authorities, NGOs and rural communities on the issue of desertification. This increasing awareness occurred at all levels, from the local to international, passing through the regional. More specifically, the NAPs and SRAPs highlighted the specificities of separate countries and regions as well as their commonalities. They thus enabled the implementation of anti-desertification programmes on a transnational basis, to complement the efforts of individual countries.

2.1.2- An institutional dynamic at the national level

At the national level, new institutions and policies have been set up to facilitate the implementation of action programmes; they include the National Coordinating Body (NCB) and country focal points. Decentralised bodies, civil society forums or development partners have supported them. Funds have been allocated to combatting desertification. While that fight appears to have lost steam today, the existing structures will offer a basis for action, once they have been replenished with the necessary resources.

2.1.3- A political force emerges at the regional level

There is a clear political will today, at the regional level, to implement a concerted strategy to combat desertification. The Convention has given the sub-regional institutions a true role to play and a policy to carry out - they have adopted. Unlike the States, they are less subject to the ebb and flow of strategies and trends among development partners. They can thus maintain the political determination which has guided them since the initial implementation of the UNCCD. The regional institutions may act as catalysts and help to facilitate and disseminate achievements (through exchanges of experience and know-how) and to implement initiatives (projects) for meeting transnational and sub-regional challenges.

2.1.4- Significant progress at the local level

Real achievements have been made at the local level. They often have a strong 'contextual' component, making it difficult to define 'recipes' for the fight against desertification. However, some common factors may be identified, among which the need for precise demands from the local community. Other common factors include the need on the part of the stakeholders themselves for financial aid or a collective endeavour, to finance their activities. This dimension is often necessary, not only for the ecological success of such action, as in, for example, rehabilitation of land or sound water management, but also for the social gains of the fight against desertification, particularly for reducing poverty.

The role of local institutions in building up such a participatory effort is, in this respect, crucial. It also implies strengthening their capacities, with respect both to participation and to the more technical facets of anti-desertification work. Such strengthening capacities should not be limited, clearly, to local institutions but should include, as far as possible, the entire rural community.

2.1.5- Some sectors are more dynamic than others

Whilst certain issues and themes have not really taken off at the regional level and remain limited to specific cases, others have succeeded. One obvious success is in the integrated management of water resources. This is probably related both to a proven methodology and to the considerable international funding made available in, amongst others, West Africa, the Nile Basin Initiative, and the North-Western Saharan Aquifer System. The goals of recovering degraded land and conserving the productive capacity of peripheral spaces - those not yet affected - are, on the whole, still being pursued by the NAPs and SRAPs, although they have not led to tangible results at the regional level. In general, they only lead to local successes - a factor which to some extent peppers the sauce without having a real global impact.

2.2 Notorious difficulties in implementing NAPs and SRAPs

2.2.1- Inadequate funding

The first factor which limits the implementation of NAPs and SRAPs is financial. Indeed, the UNCCD defines these two tools as spearheads in the fight against desertification and yet it did not allocate specific funding to implement them. Their implementation was left to the good graces of the countries and development partners. The will of these partners to make commitments to tackle this issue has been tempered by myriad factors: the mutual misunderstanding between countries of the South and of the North as to the role of the Global Mechanism, mutual disappointments, the complexity of the phenomenon, and the sparse results of the fight against desertification as well as the difficulties of its implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Moreover, in purely financial terms, the cost-benefit approach, which relates the cost of degradation due to the desertification phenomenon to that of the solutions, or to the precautionary principle, has not been widely used, whereas it might well encourage additional funding.



To monitor and evaluate the progress of National Action Programmes requires extensive inter-disciplinary knowledge

2.2.2- Knowledge deficits and feeble capacities

The phenomenon of desertification combines anthropogenic and climatic causes, whose understanding requires multi-disciplinary knowledge. There is a lack of overall, multi-disciplinary synthesis of the technical measures taken to fight desertification, as well as of their social and economic components. Moreover, it is difficult to measure the environmental and socio-economic results of combating desertification thoroughly, from the short-term to the long-term. This requires lengthy diagnostics and monitoring protocols which are difficult to set up. However, quality monitoring and evaluation will provide additional arguments for the fight against desertification and could ensure that it is adopted as a national priority. Furthermore, the advantages of ecosystems are poorly known and have not been thoroughly evaluated. The approach based on identifying the gains and services provided by ecosystems is not yet operational for arid areas.

Furthermore, the poor capacity of institutions responsible for the fight against desertification is glaringly obvious; on the national and local levels, training of focal points and administrations on technical aspects and on how to mobilise funds, is inadequate, which does not facilitate suitable activity. Institutional weakness is not only measured in terms of the specific capacity of an organisation: the place of a anti-desertification institution in the list of national or sub-regional priorities also reveals the extent to which politicians believe in the fight against desertification.

2.2.3- Insufficient political will

The fight against desertification is an unattractive one, politically speaking. As a phenomenon which is both diffuse and occurs over the long term, desertification is of little interest to politicians, who are generally more concerned with achieving quick, practical results which correspond to their term of office. Consequently, it becomes sub-regional organisations to play a long-term role in anti-desertification approaches. More generally speaking, environmental preoccupations still too often appear to be a luxury concern of industrialised countries and the long-term economic gained appear too uncertain and too difficult to quantify for economic arguments to be convincing.

It should also be understood that the rural sector has always been the poor relative of development: historically, the development of countries depends on peasant farmers while at the same time ignoring them. In other words, traditional agriculture only receives few of the benefits that it contributes to the development of any given country. Since the fight against desertification mostly concerns the agricultural sector, it is therefore not very surprising that politicians ignore it. Finally, it should be noted that this lack of political determination causes a vicious circle since it weakens the Convention. Meetings of the Parties tend to be fairly unproductive, thus emasculating the hope-giving proposals which the Convention was supposed to stimulate.

2.2.4- Fluctuating development practices

The NAPs, initially perceived as a new concept of development were once considered to be the first integrated action programmes for rural development, were. In the meantime, this integrated, participatory, programmed approach, based on a strategy of partnership with traditional development partners, has become the standard, in particular with the setting up of the Poverty Reduction Strategic Papers (PRSPs). Thus once the PRSPs had been defined, they became the documents of reference for negotiations between countries and donors. In consequence, the NAPs have to some extent been ignored or forced to integrate them. Obviously, the fight against desertification has been and remains associated with the fight against



The right use in the right place, in the right space, at the right time

poverty. This is particularly so in sub-Saharan Africa, where in order to enable the implementation of NAPs, funders have recommended that they be included in national strategies for reducing poverty. Thus, at the national level, the desertification theme has been diluted in the wider one of poverty. It has thus often lost its strong environmental component, while the other negative result is that the whole participatory process of institutional empowerment has been delegitimised. Finally, it must be said that the fight against desertification is not a priority thrust of PRSPs, which are more oriented towards the social components of the Millennium Development Goals as well as towards urban areas. Have the NAPs been replaced by the PRSPs? In fact, they are two parallel processes which should, in principle, reinforce each other.

2.2.5- The brake of sectoral reflexes

Whether on the level of national administrations or of development partners, sectoral reflexes still obstruct the emergence of an integrated policy for fighting desertification. The institutions and people with the task of fighting desertification are too often out of touch with the partner institutions responsible for development and the NAPs thus rarely become operational. It also happens that operations which are part of the fight against desertification (for example, anti-erosion techniques in agriculture) are implemented by other institutions, with no consultation.

Table 1: Major challenges to be met

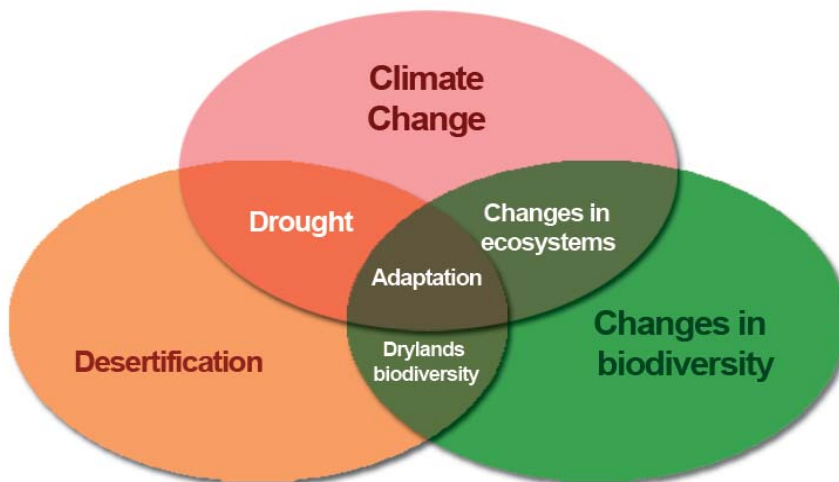
- Reinvigorate the Convention at all levels: national, regional, international
- Produce relevant know-how for desertification issues in the circum-Saharan area
- Mobilise development partners
- Restore anti-desertification as a priority for regional States
- Produce practical visible results in the fight against desertification
- Recreate a regional dynamic

2.3- Current orientations

Before describing proposals for practical actions to meet these challenges, the evaluation of the fight against desertification must be completed. Indeed, whether in scientific, technical or political fields, some key orientations are currently being considered among development partners at the international level or in African countries. The following are the main concepts at present under debate and around which future action is likely to be oriented. They should be kept in mind as contextual elements upon which an action programme may be based.

2.3.1- The synergy of the three Rio Conventions

Unlike the Convention for Combating Desertification, the Conventions for biodiversity and climate change have benefited from strong international mobilisation, whether for scientific, political, operational aspects or financing. Indeed, the fight to mitigate the impacts of climate changes and to maintain biodiversity appears to be in the interests of all inhabitants of the planet, thus requiring the involvement and action of every person. The fight against desertification, on the other hand, is too often perceived as an issue whose causes and effects are to be found at the local level. However, given its links with biodiversity, specialists now acknowledge that desertification is directly related to the simplification of ecosystems and the replacement of species which provide multiple services by species which provide fewer services. With regard to its relation with climate change, the Conference of the Parties (CoP) of December 2006 acknowledged that Africa and its arid areas are the most vulnerable to climate change and variability and would thus bear the full burden of their consequences. Recently, on the question of adaptation, the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change spoke out for countries affected by desertification. The concept of adaptation goes well beyond the framework of desertification and still has to be clearly defined. There are clear gateways between the fight against desertification and existing adaptation programmes (OSS, 2007) and these deserve to be better analysed. However, adaptation to climate changes in arid areas first requires that agricultural production systems be adapted.



Drylands is where the three conventions meet up and mesh

The synergy of the three conventions offers a unique opportunity for establishing desertification as a priority at the international level. Moreover, future discussions to negotiate the follow up to the Kyoto Protocol offer a very good opportunity for reinforcing the question of adaptation within the UNFCCC, and subsequently the fight against desertification.

2.3.2- Northern countries preoccupied by migration

The political discourse on the social aspects of the relationship between poverty and desertification now tends to integrate the migration factor. This dimension, which is still little understood, makes it possible to grasp desertification in terms of its regional and world aspects. Fighting against desertification thus becomes a way of enabling large segments of the population to remain on their land and in their territory. The concept of environmental refugees has also enriched the debate. Here again, more sophisticated scientific results are necessary for orienting aid and decision-making.

2.3.3- Infrastructure projects back in favour

After the years of structural adjustment and the questioning of major infrastructure projects, it appears that development policies are once again being oriented towards investment in infrastructure. There are now new technologies which can significantly reduce the environmental impacts of such projects. As for social issues, such as the displacement of populations when a dam is built, past errors are no longer tolerated. By enabling local communities to help choose the way in which work is to be carried out, these projects can be achieved on a win-win basis. This enables real development potential, whether for irrigation, the production of energy or transport, for which funding may be found. Thus, the development of an anti-desertification component in these projects should be a priority.

2.3.4- New territorial development policies

In Africa, the process of administrative decentralisation and policies for natural resource management are on the rise in many countries. Such administrations are growing in importance and showing the real potential of localised management of the fight against desertification, and of combining it with a territorial development policy conducted through a partnership between the State and local Authorities. Territorial development offers an opportunity for integrating the fight against desertification in a territorial development project while protecting vulnerable ecosystems and assigning land use to specific activities depending on its potential. Such an approach is promising. It also implies formal recognition and securing of land ownership systems within flexible, open-ended frameworks. The current revision of land ownership legislation in some countries may allow for easier access to land based on the implementation of environmental protection practices; such

policies require supervision and operational administrative systems. Particular attention should be paid to the potential impacts of such land policies on land access for the poorest and marginalised communities.



3

Proposed action for a regional community programme to fight desertification in the circum-Saharan space

The situation is very clear: in spite of the efforts made over the last 10 years to implement the UNCCD and its related national and sub-regional action plans, the phenomenon of desertification has not ceased to grow. It is compromising the development efforts of African countries. Thus challenged, these countries, in particular those located in arid and semi-arid regions, will have to intensify their efforts to implement the Convention, to act as leaders and as a powerful force for creative proposals.

To do so, the need has been urgent to initiate and implement practical, well thought-out and effective actions for key sectors in the fight against desertification in Africa and in particular in the circum-Saharan space. We have thus listed a set of specific and detailed recommendations below. Rather than defining a complete programme, it is preferable to implement such solutions today. They will enable more rapid and more effective progress at the regional level.

3.1- Generation of knowledge, and exchange of data and experiences: the role of research for development

3.1.1- Generation of knowledge

It is a major challenge to generate the knowledge required to deal with desertification problems in the circum-Saharan zone. Moreover, Africa should lead the way in this. The mobilisation of local and traditional knowledge is equally important and collaboration between scientists and organisations in civil society should also be encouraged. It is therefore necessary to produce guidelines for capitalising on local know-how of effective anti-desertification practices in Africa. A high-level African science workgroup should be considered, with a focus embracing, amongst others: promoting traditional knowledge and the self-sufficiency of poor rural communities; strengthening arguments in terms of

the services provided by ecosystems and well-faring communities; and further discussion on adaptation to climate change and the relationships between conflicts and natural resources. In this respect, instead of considering setting up a separate group modeled upon the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the framework of the Convention, it would be better to encourage synergies between the various Conventions and set up a sub-group within the IPCC, today well-known for the quality of its scientific syntheses for decision-makers. Such a group should mainly comprise African researchers, who alone are able to adapt research questions to field realities, in terms of the impacts of climate changes and vulnerability and adaptation issues.

3.1.2- Decentralised strengthening of regional capacities

In the implementation of the UNCCD, one important theme is the development of regional training courses designed to strengthen the capacity of State departments, in particular decentralised ones, with the approval of central government. The themes for these training programmes, which would be defined and drawn up at the sub-regional level, would be adapted and validated at the country level; this would enable both a standardised approach and economies of scale. Such approaches have, in particular, been developed by OSS for 10 years for NAPS monitoring and evaluation and for implementing its environmental observation and assessment facility known as DOSE. This approach must also be based on such suitable tools as a dictionary of the fight against desertification, with a State-of-the-art review, for both transnational and transcontinental projects. The enduring reference work of the manual by Rochette should be updated and enhanced for pedagogical use. It is still, it should be noted, an open question of whether such local initiatives, reasonably well measured, are adequate to mitigate the changes caused by desertification, by climate change and by communities.



Toolboxes and training are essential for monitoring and evaluating NAPs

3.1.3- Promoting effective exchange of information at all levels

The exchange of data between national administrations and between countries in the framework of development projects is often difficult. The data, whether meteorological, hydrological or other, is too often considered by the administrations which hold them as a strategic stake or a source of power. However, with the development of Information and Communication Technologies, open information flows are unavoidable. Gradually such data, which is essential for careful assessment of issues and needs, will be made available on the Internet or in worldwide data bases located in developed countries (such as Google Earth). The increasing number of administrations and research organisations equipped with computer networks, broadband Internet facilities and efficient data bases means that the very idea of keeping data for oneself and believing that one owns it is obsolete. The highest political Authorities must accept this process and ensure that administrators very clearly understand that otherwise they will simply be excluded from the increasing number of world data bases. Moreover, a freer access to environmental data would widen the perspectives for researchers on the continent.

This process of data exchange should add value to existing tools developed in the framework of projects for the fight against desertification. These include, in particular, such cartographic servers as GEOOSS and GEOSASS at OSS. Strengthening these tools, and enhancing updating them, will simplify information tasks, and facilitate decision-making for management and stewardship of natural resources.

3.1.4- Developing a research policy

In Africa, research and, more particularly, research for development, depends on national finance or is undertaken in international research centres. External funding is rare and difficult to obtain. The regional scale would appear to offer an opportunity for funding transnational African research, thus facilitating collaboration and exchanges between national teams fighting desertification. Funding, grants, awards or even calls for tender could be managed at the regional level by specific institutions. It might also be possible to create new research centres if complementary to others on the scale of the circum-Saharan area.

3.2- The importance of regional cooperation

3.2.1- Promoting exchanges of experience and inter-regional and inter-country dialogue

Many of anti-desertification techniques are common to all three sub-regions. The exchange of experience between communities, organisations in civil society, scientists

and decentralised administrative departments, should be encouraged. Exchanges about pilot projects and methodologies for experiments, with special regard for changes of scale, are a useful contribution here. They could take place either through international workshops where the relevant ecological and organisational conditions for their implementation would be discussed and exchanged, or by organising study visits between regions with a potential for such exchanges. This type of policy could lead to twinning of districts or local governments in different regions.

3.2.2- Implementation of transnational micro-projects

These exchanges could lead to the design and implementation of transnational micro-projects for which funding would have to be found. The complementarities between the North and South of the Sahara would also have to be explored in the framework of South-South partnerships (in particular African, but not exclusively).

3.2.3- Creation of centres for decentralised development, with regional coordination

The current process of decentralisation is a very important phase in most African countries. It offers a framework for the empowerment of local communities, enabling them to strengthen their capacity to undertake local, practical initiatives inspired by successful experiments. The creation of regional development clusters is essential for dynamising the arid areas of the region.

3.2.4- Taking advantage of existing common initiatives at the regional level

The firm, realistic commitments made by African decision-makers may offer a major opportunity to further the fight against desertification and strengthen the UNCCD: local impact and community mobilisation around major regional initiatives are essential. The African 'Green Wall' initiative should benefit local communities. The proposed natural gas pipeline linking Nigeria with Algeria provides an opportunity to resolve the complex issue of domestic energy and firewood in some Sahel countries; it should be accompanied by development projects for making some areas more accessible and for exchange between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan



The Green Wall initiative, literal or figurative, shows Africa's commitment

Africa. Further, the Inga hydroelectric dam project should make it possible to overcome the main bottleneck to development in Africa: the cost of energy. All of these proposals can link the fight against desertification to practical development projects. This will in turn demonstrate the will to fight desertification and have a catalytic effect, thus offering a satisfactory response to the major constraints encountered by the UNCCD.

3.2.5- Defining a regional common vision, broken down into projects

There is a need to develop a regional community programme with a common vision of rural environmental management. This unique programme would bring together various fundamental factors involved in sustainable development, in particular the objectives of the three Rio Conventions and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It should be based on joint validation, defining the priorities for implementation. This common vision and programme should be translated into a set of practical and synergetic efforts to be implemented in the enlarged framework of the fight against desertification. These efforts, in accordance with the 'community' reference, should be adapted and validated in a participatory way at the national level. They would comprise proven methods and techniques with known costs and benefits, highlighting traditional know-how, while introducing new approaches and technologies. Finally, these actions should, whenever possible, relate to the priorities defined by international funding institutions, such as the GEF operational strategy.

3.2.6- Defining a regional environment-friendly agricultural policy

Inter-regional trading of local products should be encouraged to the extent that it enables communities to adapt to climate variability, to be less dependent on North-South exchanges and, especially, to ensure food security at the regional level. A common agricultural policy for the region should thus be developed at the same time as a regional framework for the fight against desertification. It would aim to overcome obstacles to regional transnational trade of local agro-food products by facilitating access to markets as well as rational customs policies. With respect to the rest of the world, it would thus be able to protect markets and the interests of local farmers through regional standardisation of custom tariffs, giving African countries more influence in international commercial negotiations, particularly through the World Trade Organization.

There are already seed and gene data banks in some countries in the region. They are used to conserve and improve the economic potential of the biodiversity of arid regions. These seed and gene data banks can also be used at the regional level for effective research into drought-resistant crops, and to better manage the biodiversity of arid regions.

Finally, in our arid, semi-arid and sub-humid dry regions, agricultural exchanges can also be conceptualised through the notion of 'virtual water'. Virtual water accounts for the amounts of water used for the agricultural production of a given product and hence the amounts of water transferred between countries by agricultural trade. Such an approach can help implement a more rational water management policy.

3.3- Reinforcing institutions

Reinvigorating institutions responsible for the fight against desertification

African countries must develop their capacity to better organise themselves to manage technical, financial and institutional aspects: at the national level, this might mean, for instance, that the focal points of the three Rio Conventions would form an inter-ministerial group in order to handle environmental problems jointly through their respective ministries. The operation of focal points should be reviewed to make them more effective.

The fight against desertification requires a holistic approach so that the relationships between sectoral policies and NAPs can be taken into account. This also requires redefining the institutional roles in each of the countries and the management of development strategies which emphasize inter-sectoral work.

The regional scale may be a way of driving institutional aspects by questioning the different countries about this approach and by offering well-informed assessments and formulating possible action plans, such as specific proposals designed for specific contexts in African countries affected by desertification.

3.4- The need for monitoring and evaluation

Developing criteria for monitoring the fight against desertification

The lack of clear and quantified objectives in the Convention makes it difficult to establish indicators for monitoring and measuring. Their availability would enable all stakeholders to compare progress, achievements and failures and would promote the greater involvement of the scientific and development communities in tackling land degradation. The States in the circum-Saharan space should today suggest that such indicators be defined on a global level. For example, one might add a specific indicator for land degradation as part of target 9 of the Millennium Development Goal number 7.



Over-use of firewood, however inevitable, reduces land cover and induces soil degradation

Table 2: United Nations indicators for Millennium Development Goal number 7
<http://millenniumindicators.un.org>

MDG 7: Ensure a sustainable environment

Target 9

Integrate sustainable development principles in national policies and reverse the current trend towards the loss of environmental resources

Indicators

25. Proportion of forest areas

26. Surface areas of protected land for maintaining biodiversity (in relation to total surface area)

27. Energy consumed per 1,000 dollars of GDP

28. Emissions of carbon dioxide by inhabitant and consumption of chlorofluorocarbons which diminish the ozone layer

29. Proportion of the population using solid fuels

3.5- International framework for dialogue and action

3.5.1- Proposing a contract to developed countries

The various endeavours mentioned above will enable States in the circum-Saharan zone to demonstrate their strong determination to implement the Convention, to fight against desertification and to work for sustainable development and the reduction of poverty in affected areas. This might then enable them to propose a clear contract to developed countries and development partners in general. This contract should be based on the concept of Global Public Goods. In other words, they should demonstrate why it is worthwhile cooperating to fight desertification in the circum-Saharan zone, why the challenge concerns everybody and why all countries have an interest and advantage in working together. The arguments that could be put forward include:

- the relationship with climate change;
- the relationship with the conservation of biodiversity;
- migration;
- experience of adaptation to climate variability.

Desertification, unlike the first impressions of States not directly concerned by the phenomenon, had been perceived as a phenomenon which admittedly was globally distributed but whose causes and consequences were local or at most regional. Thus, the fight against desertification and the corresponding Convention have never been given the attention that they deserve from development partners. Today, we must strongly and clearly affirm that the fight against desertification concerns everyone. The circum-Saharan zone should convey this message, which would be even more powerful for all Parties if it were delivered with specific actions and measures that States intend to implement.

3.5.2- Mobilising at the international level - communication counts

In addition to practical action for development of research, of indicators and for proposing such a contract, States should also think in terms of communication and lobbying in order to motivate the international community to get involved in the fight against desertification. To this end, the idea of mobilising one or more proponents of the fight against desertification, well-known personalities, possibly in other fields, and who are capable of acting as ambassadors for this cause and of mobilising politicians, administrators, technicians and people beyond their borders, should be pursued.

3.6- The financial aspects

New methods of financing and increasing national NAP budgets

The increase in national budgets for the implementation of NAPs is a first necessary stage to demonstrate the priority that States give to the fight against desertification. Furthermore, the effective establishment of national and regional funds for the fight against desertification is of fundamental importance. Such funds could then leverage international funds more easily. Moreover, a procedure for calls for proposals, for which transnational demands would be jointly formulated by the decentralised structures concerned in liaison with their ministries (focal points, environment), is an interesting possibility for disseminating local achievements. Finally, the point is also to integrate the actions of NAPs in current funding, in particular in those proposed by Operational Programme 15 of the GEF.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the anti-desertification SRAPs has demonstrated the utility of action on the sub-regional level. Moreover, in this perspective, the circum-Saharan space appears to be the ideal geographic unit for strengthening the fight against desertification around the Sahara and the Sahel. There are in fact several complementarities between States and the sub-regions. Africans in general, and Saharans and Sahelians in particular, should lead the way in reinvigorating the Convention to fight desertification. They should act as a creative force by making proposals requiring them to increase their knowledge and mobilise partners around new approaches. To do this, the regional level definitely offers the greatest potential.

Through this analysis, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory has suggested specific practical actions for revitalising the fight against desertification. But, since it would only be a first step, how should it be followed up?

Once this document has been validated, it should be rapidly followed by action. One concrete thrust could be to draw up a regional training programme for capacity building. Another could be to design an African 'Calls for tenders' system on the basis of regional funds to be allotted to this purpose. The drafting of a regional community programme is an ambitious project, but also requires the time for implementing a participatory process as well as a precise analysis of the relationships between the work conducted at the national level and that of the sub-regional and regional levels. The OSS is committed to continue this work, which we consider to be crucial for sustainable development of Africa for Africans and especially by Africans.

Finally, we believe it is important to remember that regional consensus building on desertification will inevitably emphasize the strong relationships between conflicts and natural resources. Repeated droughts and the rarity and degradation of natural resources may lead to conflicts; the conflicts themselves have a considerable impact on natural resources and development in the widest meaning of the term. All this often leads to the massive displacement of populations and an increase in regional and international refugees who themselves cause tensions around natural resources. Thus, regional peace and stability are *sine qua non* conditions for an effective fight against desertification.

AFTERWORD

This present paper was a resource document at the regional workshop on resource mobilisation and partnership building in cooperation for the fight against desertification, held in Gabes, Tunisia, from 17 to 19 June, 2007. The workshop was organised by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Tunisia in collaboration with the AMU, ECOWAS/CILSS, CEN-SAD and OSS.

This important regional meeting was attended by representatives of regional and sub-regional organisations involved in natural resource management and in the fight against desertification in particular (AMU, CEN-SAD, CILSS, ECOWAS, FAO, ICARDA, IDB). The countries of the two sub-regions of North Africa and West Africa were also represented in the workshop (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, and Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal respectively).

The objectives of the workshop were:

- to facilitate exchanges between the sub-Saharan region and the region north of the Sahara, with regard to experiences gained and lessons learned in the fight against desertification and to national strategies for supporting the implementation of NAPs;
- to identify opportunities for strengthening North-South and South-South cooperation within the framework of major initiatives at regional and international level (NEPAD, Solarid, TerrAfrica, Green Wall ...);
- to mobilise development partners in strengthening research-development approaches and the implementation of anti-desertification action programmes

Four main recommendations were made:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Defining policy positions for the circum-Sahara space

Considering the present crisis in the implementation of the UNCCD;

Noting the scant interest taken by some policies in the fight against desertification;

Given the need to revitalise the UNCCD;

Given the important place of the fight against desertification in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals,

It is important to develop a set of policy positions which take into account:

- the inter-relationships of desertification, climate changes and biological diversity, and the need to demonstrate that the fight against desertification is as much as regional Public Good as one at the national and global level;
- the imperative need to make the fight against desertification a priority for States, by incorporating it in integrated development strategies, plans and programmes at national and regional levels;
- the necessity of developing a shared regional vision which can translate into concrete efforts within a regional programme that links them to sustainable development.

This process of developing policy positions will serve to forge a African political belief that promotes the fight against desertification at the international level through an international framework of dialogue and action.

In thus recommending this process, the workshop participants request OSS to undertake it in collaboration with AMU, CEN-SAD, ECOWAS/CILLS and IGAD.

- Indicator for monitoring its implementation: the establishment of a group or committee of supporters of the fight against desertification.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Establish a high-level African scientific working group

The circum-Saharan space is the area most affected by desertification and land degradation, and that most vulnerable to climate changes.

Given the pressing nature of reform of the UNCCD, there is a specific role to be played by a high-level African scientific working group.

The mission of this working group should include:

- the generation of knowledge across the circum-Sahara which appropriate to the fight against desertification
- the improvement of monitoring and evaluation facilities, and the development of indicators of the impact of anti-desertification measures and of the overall phenomenon of desertification;
- the strengthening of data exchange and information flows at all levels;
- the development of strategies and efforts for building scientific and technical capacity amongst development players;
- the definition of modalities for the development and funding of a policy for transnational African research.

The workshop participants recommended that OSS coordinate the establishment of the working group, with members from national, sub-regional, regional and international research institutions.

- Indicator for monitoring its implementation: the establishment by OSS of a Website/directory of organisations working in natural resource management, for use by those

involved in the fight against desertification. Furthermore, the working group will produce regular reports.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Establishment of appropriate and permanent funding mechanism for the fight against desertification in the countries and at the regional level of the circum-Saharan.

Given the paucity of financial resources so far mobilised for the fight against desertification despite the efforts made by the States concerned and the international community, there is a need to establish an appropriate and permanent funding mechanism for the fight against desertification in the countries and at the regional level of the circum-Saharan, by means of:

- increasing national budget allocations to the fight against desertification;
- improved assessments and management of national financial resources allocated to the fight against desertification, paying due emphasis to their economic benefits and to the cost of inaction;
- capacity building in the States and at the regional level, in order to increase capacities for mobilising finance in general and the financial resources of Operational Programme 15 of GEF in particular. In addition, information should be made available online about available services, mechanisms and funds for environmental projects in the fight against desertification and in climate change.

The participants at the workshop recommended to AMU, CEN-SAD, ECOWAS/CILSS and IGAD to pool their efforts in establishing an appropriate and permanent funding mechanism for the fight against desertification in the circum-Saharan.

- Indicator for monitoring its implementation: the establishment of operational funds at national and sub-regional levels for the fight against desertification. Furthermore, National Actions Plans will be updated and integrated into the economic development plans of the countries concerned.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Development of a shared Saharan-Sahelian vision of the fight against desertification

Taking into account the progress made in the fight against desertification in the circum-Saharan;

Considering the difficulties and constraints encountered in the implementation of the fight against desertification, at institutional, technical, scientific and financial levels;

Considering the catalytic and facilitating role played by sub-regional institutions and the consequent need for a regional policy thrust;

Given the high degree of mobilisation of key players in the fight against desertification in transnational forms and with inter-State complementarities; and

Considering the cross-cutting and transnational nature of the fight against desertification;

the participants at the workshop recommend that AMU, CEN-SAD, ECOWAS/CILSS and IGAD initiate a process of developing a shared vision with a view to elaborating a joint programme for regional cooperation for the fight against desertification and for climate change adaptation in the circum-Saharan.

- Indicator for monitoring its implementation: the organisation of a conference of top policy-makers of AMU, CEN-SAD, ECOWAS/CILSS and IGAD to validate the joint programme. Furthermore, agreements for scientific cooperation will be reached and approved between the sub-regional African bodies concerned.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|---------|--|
| AMU | Arab Maghreb Union |
| CEN-SAD | Community of Sahel-Saharan States |
| CILSS | <i>Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte Contre la Sécheresse du Sahel</i> |
| CoP | Conference of the Parties |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| FAO | Food and Agricultural Organisation |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| IBD | Islamic Bank for Development |
| ICARDA | International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas |
| IGAD | Inter-Governmental Authority on Development |
| IPCC | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change |
| MDG | Millenium Development Goal |
| NCB | National Coordinating Body |
| NEPAD | New Partnership for Africa's Development |
| OSS | Sahel and Sahara Observatory |
| NAP | National Action Programme |
| PSRP | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper |
| ROSELT | <i>Réseau d'observatoires pour la surveillance écologique à long terme</i> |
| SRAP | Sub-Regional Action Programme |
| TPN | Thematic Programme Network |
| UNCBD | United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity |
| UNCCD | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |

The process of desertification has three sharp edges: the degradation of land, harder access to ever poorer water, and shrinking biodiversity – all elements which support the lives of many millions. It demands even greater comprehension than the desert itself. It is not just the evocative ‘march of the desert’, fed by naïve images of ‘dune doom’ – it is more pernicious than that.

Desertification is the silent crucible of new, inhospitable drylands, killing species and livelihoods by stealth. It is a chilling equation: the lack of means for the proper management of fragile resources under pressure is now compounded by escalating, brutal climatic changes.

This outline for a joint programme – in essence a plea to ‘don’t give up the fight’ – in the circum-Sahara can help lift today’s fight against desertification to a new level. It offers new opportunities for desertification to be better understood, better managed and better beaten. Opportunities that are transboundary, national, sub-regional, regional, with official bodies, civil society and partners engaged in the common combat.

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