



DOWN TO EARTH

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION



Time for a change

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The very nature of this Convention makes it a sustainable development convention *par excellence*, addressing key issues for developing countries such as poverty eradication, food security, sustainable agriculture, and the promotion of sustainable livelihood not necessarily dependent on the vulnerable natural resource base.

The Convention is now being implemented by most country Parties to it. To date a total number of 169 are Parties to the Convention and more are expected to join soon.

However, we note with increased concern that this process lacks the kind of support it is entitled to, in terms of financial assistance from the international community for its timely and effective implementation.

This can undoubtedly be seen as a major constraint in the implementation process of the UNCCD in many countries. The UNCCD, unlike other Rio Conventions does not have access to GEF funding for its implementation.

One can wonder whether the international community has been consistent in putting in place a financial mechanism in support of other Rio Conventions and not for the UNCCD. All affected countries and a certain number of their developed partners are starting to realise this situation and are looking towards the only suitable and well funded mechanism, the Global Environmental Facility.

If we consider that the UNCCD is the only legally binding instrument that came as a concrete and direct recommendation of the Rio Summit, we must admit that the international community misjudged the importance of the issues at stake when it decided not to grant it direct access to GEF resources.

In the early years of this process, mindful of the real opportunities created by the Convention, the developing countries were willing to give this decision the benefit of the doubt and try to work towards the implementation of the UNCCD through other mechanisms of funding, and to give their support to the establishment of this mechanism.

Unfortunately, six years after this Convention was created, we all must admit that sustained funding has failed to come to this process.

A tangible example was provided by the national reporting process required from African country Parties for the third session of the COP. Notwithstanding the financial difficulties encountered in that process, the African countries delivered their obligations in an outstanding way by presenting by the established deadline, more than 40 reports. Similar difficulties have characterized the reporting process, this year, of country Parties of Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite this, more than 80 reports have been received from these two regions.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the UNCCD secretariat for the way in which it spared no efforts to raise funds to meet at least the minimum financial needs required to ensure the success of the reporting process. May I also add that, despite all those efforts, the amount raised to cover the needs of all African countries is equivalent to the grant that the GEF allocates to one single country for its "enabling activities".

I am convinced that any impartial observer will agree that this constitutes a rather unfair situation, particularly if we consider that we are dealing here with the poorest countries in the world.

It is important for us to underline that this situation cannot continue without seriously hampering the success of this vital process. As we engage more and more in the implementation phase of the UNCCD, it is indispensable that country Parties be provided with the same tools as other conventions to maximize or improve their ability to meet their obligations successfully.

We have to also underline that the UNCCD implementation cannot be conceived only in bilateral terms as it remains a multilateral instrument addressing the vital issue of sustainable development in arid ecosystems.

In the light of the ongoing preparation of the "Rio plus ten" review, it is essential for the developing country Parties to re-assess their position at this crucial venture and make concrete and urgently needed proposals for the long term financing of the UNCCD implementation that should take into considerations the problems exposed. This is a historical responsibility that we will assume fully. □

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African countries assess progresses and identify priority actions

The National Focal Points of 36 Countries, representatives of six sub-regional organisations and eight non-governmental organisations, as well as of African and international organisations attended the African Regional Conference preparatory to the Fourth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification (COP-4). The Conference was held in Algiers, Algeria, from 22-24 October 2000, organised by the UNCCD Secretariat in collaboration with the Government of Algeria.

Participants focussed in particular on Africa's position on issues in the agenda of COP-4, and on the review of the implementation process in the region since the COP-3, at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.

However, specific attention was devoted also to the development of the Action Plan for Enhancing Global Environment Facility (GEF) Support for Land Degradation, already considered by the GEF Council last year. In this framework, participants urged for all necessary measures and arrangements to explore the best options for the funding of UNCCD related programmes by the Global Environmental Facility.

Participants also requested the Global Mechanism to enhance actions towards the necessary resource mobilization for the preparation of national reports, and implementation of activities at all levels. They called for financial synergies with other multilateral environmental Agreements, and called upon bilateral and multilateral development partners of African countries to provide or to continue to provide them substantial financial resources in order to enable them to fulfil their mandate and obligations under the Convention.

Additional recommendations referred to the preparation for future appointments, in particular Rio+10, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and the elaboration of a Dryland Land Degradation Assessment (LADA), as well as proposals for the future agenda of work of the Committee of Science and Technology.

In Africa, as of to date already 17 National Action Programmes (NAPs) have been finalized, nearly half of which have been formally adopted by the respective governments. Participants evaluated progresses reached, as well as constraints which include

: insufficient awareness of the populations in countries that have not been able to launch the NAP process; insufficient integration of national plans and strategies; lack of sufficient funding at various stages (elaboration, implementation of NAPs); absence of synergies between the Rio Conventions' implementation in most countries.

In this framework, they also identified priority actions to address these concerns, namely strengthened decentralization; enhancement of links between national focal points and authorities for development co-operation; integration of UNCCD programmes into national development strategies and other relevant policy areas; increased involvement of civil society; evaluation of progress by using pertinent, quantifiable and readily verifiable indicators and benchmarks; further awareness raising, education, training, income generating activities and access to credit, in particular addressed to women.

Activities at the **sub-regional levels** were illustrated by representatives respectively of CILSS/ECOWAS (Western Africa); SADC (Southern Africa); IGAD (Eastern Africa); UMA (Arab Maghreb) and CEMAC (Central Africa). A number of activities have been launched to implement the four SRAPs already adopted, although financial constraints remain a main obstacle. Representatives of the sub-regional organizations illustrated the respective initiatives undertaken, which include for example awareness raising campaigns; meetings of thematic groups for project formulation; workshops on resource mobilization (in collaboration also with the GM); and the progress achieved in relation to the transboundary projects identified in particular among CILSS and UMA country Parties.

At the regional level, all administrative procedures to put in place the Regional Coordinating Unit and to ensure its functioning have been completed. The RCU is hosted by African Development Bank in Abidjan and now operational. Consultative meetings have been held to consider the formal launching of the first three (3) out of the six Thematic Programme Networks (TPNs) for the RAP. However, again, participants recalled that further financial resources are needed to operationalize these networks and thereby implement the RAP. In this regard, participants recommended that the COP-4 includes RCU costs in its core budget. □



2000

31 January – 2 February
Mexico City, Mexico
Regional meeting on national reporting

7-9 February
Cotonou, Benin
Regional Meeting of Selected African CCD Focal Points on NAP implementation

11-14 February
Dubai, UAE
International Conference on Desertification

16-18 February
Rome, Italy
Social participation to combat desertification – assessment, adaptation and design of pilot implementation scheme for the use of EASW methodology in the framework of Annex IV (16)
Ministerial meeting of Annex IV Countries (17)
Workshop on synergies between desertification, climate change, biodiversity and forest between Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries (18)

23-24 February
Almaty, Kazakhstan
Workshop on national reporting for Central Asia

29 February – 1 March
Beirut, Lebanon
Workshop on national reporting for Western Asian Focal Points

Events

6-8 March

*Bamako, Mali
Second Africa-Latin America
and Caribbean Forum on the
Implementation of the UNCCD*

14-17 March

*New Delhi, India
TPN2 Launch Meeting (Asian
Regional Thematic Programme
Network on Agroforestry and
Soil Conservation in Arid,
Semi-arid and Dry Sub-humid
Areas)
Workshop on national
reporting*

23-28 March

*Bonn, Germany
Consultative Meeting on TPN
on Integrated Management of
Water Resources of
Transboundary River, Lake
and Hydrogeological Basins for
Africa (23-24)
Consultative Meeting on the
TPN on Agroforestry and Soil
Conservation for Africa (25-
26)
Consultative Meeting on the
TPN on Rational Use of
Rangelands and Fodder Crops
for Africa (27-28)*

30-31 March

*Kingston, Jamaica
National awareness seminar*

20-22 April

*N'Djamena, Chad
National forum on NAP
validation*

(continued)

Latin America and the Caribbean countries call for GEF desertification window

The implementation process of the UNCCD in Latin America and the Caribbean shows significant progresses, including the increase of institutional and inter-institutional co-ordination, as well as of public awareness of issues at stake.

However, challenges ahead remain relevant and stronger international support will be necessary to meet them. In this framework, country Parties of the region called for the opening at the Global Environmental Fund (GEF) of a specific window with sufficient and adequate resources to address UNCCD related priorities, in particular the financing of the formulation and implementation of National Action Programs (NAPs), in response to the urgent need for fresh resources as expressed also by country Parties of other affected regions.

These are among the main conclusions highlighted by focal points and representatives of 28 country Parties of the region that gathered from 16 to 19 October in San Salvador for the Sixth Regional Meeting to discuss successes and obstacles in the UNCCD implementation process. A specific workshop on resource mobilization with representatives of the Global Mechanism followed on 20-21 October.

Eight NAPs have already been finalized in the region, as well as six sub-regional ones. Desertification is now included in school curricula of some country Parties, while increasing communication with, and involvement of civil society also reflects a positive trend. Progress continues also for the nine projects included in the Regional Action Programme, although limited financial resources allowed for the launching of only the information network (DESELAC <http://www.rolac.unep.mx/deselac>) and the project for parameters and indicators for ecosystems in arid lands in Latin America.

Partnership mobilization of developed country Parties, in particular for capacity building and training, knowledge and technology transfer, was deemed still insufficient and as such one of the major obstacles to the successful implementation of the UNCCD, together with lack of coherent policies at the national level, of integration with other conventions, and the non inclusion of desertification and drought programmes in national development policies and reconstruction plans.

The 6th Regional Meeting therefore highlighted the need to support the following pri-

orities: assure or assist the implementation of the NAPs; strengthen and consolidate the national co-ordination organisms, the national focal points, as well as the Regional Executing Committee and the Regional Co-ordinating Unit, namely through the inclusion of the latter in the Secretariat's core budget; promote the harmonization of public policies; increase NGOs and civil society participation; encourage and ensure national and regional training of specialized human resources within the framework of an investigation project that considers the multi-dimension of desertification and the recovery of the traditional knowledge.

Participants further highlighted the need for additional information tools, monitoring and early warning systems, as well as of mechanisms and tools to facilitate the integration and participation of the private sector and civil society. Economic incentives and other instruments will be essential to facilitate the involvement of the private sector, small community and peasant organizations, and the channelling of fiscal and private investment to combat land degradation. Impact indicators, among which the economics ones, should be further developed in order to determine the economic losses due to land degradation.

Reports on specific issues provided additional elements to the global picture. Particular attention was devoted to Central America, where the most populated areas coincide with those most vulnerable to desertification. Poverty remains the direct cause of non-sustainable agricultural practices. Central America social-economic dynamics exclude poor people from the most suitable agricultural land, while unsustainable deforestation for grazing purposes further worsens the situation. Soil erosion heavily affects water availability, its use in agriculture and for human consumption. Furthermore, desertification increases vulnerability to hurricanes, strong rain falls, which regularly affect the Central America region, with related, heavy economic costs.

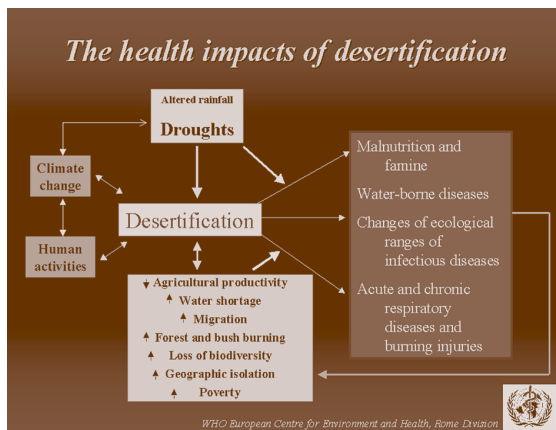
The Sixth Regional Meeting was co-organized by the Government of El Salvador and the UNCCD Secretariat. Participants included representatives of regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations, agencies from the United Nations system and NGOs. The seventh Regional Meeting will take place in Chile, tentatively in September 2001. □

The health impacts of desertification and drought

By Bettina Menne and Roberto Bertollini
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At the beginning of the 21st century, environmental changes on an unprecedented and global scale have begun to impinge upon human health simultaneously, and often interactively. These changes include altered composition of the atmosphere, depletion of terrestrial aquifers and ocean fisheries, loss of biodiversity, and the process of desertification and land degradation. The health impacts of some of these trends will become apparent during the coming decades.

In arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas desertification and drought already present a serious threat to the well-being and health of the local populations. They are directly linked to food and water shortages, conflicts, mass migration, increased poverty, increased risk of fires, decreased availability of fuel and limited access to health care.



The extent of the impact depends on the vulnerability of populations and individuals, and on pre-existing conditions. A complex mix of factors determines the degree of individuals' vulnerability, including age, gender, disability, genetics, immune status, income, cultural knowledge, legal rights, and access to health services. Causes of population vulnerability include poverty, inequalities, access to services and medicine, geographical isolation, population size and technological development. Demographic increases when resources are scarce make societies even more vulnerable.

In affected areas, a vicious circle links desertification to declining agricultural productivity and individual income levels, leading to severe economic crises and poverty for entire countries, communities and families that depend primarily on rural income. Poverty directly affects health. Those countries with the lowest GDP per capita have the highest infant mortality rates.

From a public health point of view we are living through what is, historically, a major transition in

human health. Noncommunicable diseases (such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and depression) predominate in developed countries. In poorer countries, infectious diseases (especially in childhood) remain important, even as noncommunicable diseases increase in urban populations due to changes in lifestyle and environmental and occupational exposures. However, many countries suffer under a double burden of all these diseases.

The balance sheet is indelibly stained by the avoidable burden of disease and malnutrition that the world's disadvantaged populations continue to bear. Some analysts have characterized a world of incomplete epidemiological transition, in which epidemiologically polarized subpopulations have been left behind.

In the case of dryland degradation and drought, health care services are often badly disrupted due to population movements and deteriorating financial and economic conditions. Disrupted health systems become unable to cope with the population's needs. National health and anti-desertification policies should therefore be coordinated and integrated.

Furthermore, desertification leads not only to staple food shortages but also to a decrease in the wild plants that provide nutritional supplements for the entire family. Desertification, deforestation and overuse of wilderness areas have drastically reduced the amount of supplementary products gathered in the bush, such as vegetable butter. Bush meat in West Africa in particular is a major source of animal protein but it is increasingly less available due to the destruction of dry forest and woodland habitat. Changes in local biodiversity might put at risk traditional medicine, which holds a very important place in all parts of Africa, in villages remote from modern chemist shops where medicines are in any case beyond the reach of country people.

Women and children are most vulnerable to droughts. Women are increasingly becoming breadwinners in addition to their domestic and caretaker roles. They are exposed to higher stress when searching for water and fuel wood at increasing walking distances. However, as their earnings are likely to be lower, patterns of poverty are easily perpetuated. Studies in Zimbabwe in 1994-1995 found out that for women the effects on the body-mass index were temporary and if it rained the following year, women gained much of the lost body index. But for children aged 12-24 months droughts can have permanent effects.

The "technology" exists to prevent or control most of the world's biggest killers because they are linked to factors such as inadequate levels of food supply, safe water, secure shelter, and access to education and healthcare. A population's technological vulnerability necessarily reflects its economic conditions and cultural values. Some technologies affect basic community vulnerability (for example, wholesale and retail food storage and safety inspection facilities); others affect the capacity to prevent or treat specific injuries



8-9 May

Brussels, Belgium
Workshop on Land degradation and Desertification in Central and Eastern Europe

8-11 May

Menemen, Turkey
Conference on The future of the Mediterranean Rural Environment. Prospects for Sustainable land use and Management

17-21 June

Brazzaville, Congo
National awareness raising days

15-18 June

Murcia, Spain
Meeting of focal points of the group of Annex IV countries (15)
Ministerial meeting of the group of Annex IV countries (16)
Mediterranean NGO's Conference of the group of Annex IV countries (16-18)
Meeting of Focal Points and NGOs of the group of Annex IV countries (18)

17 June

World Day to Combat Desertification

28-30 June

Tokyo, Japan
TPN 1 Workshop (Asian regional thematic programme network on desertification monitoring and assessment)

Events

30 June

Burkina Faso

Official launching of the implementation of NAP

9-11 July

Nouakchott, Mauritania

First forum on NAP elaboration

18-20 July

Bishkek, Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan

Experts meeting on the preparation of the Sub-regional Action Programme (SRAP) to combat Desertification in the Aral Sea Basin in the context of UNCCD

6-8 September

Niamey, Niger

National Forum to validate the NAP

20 September

Brussels, Belgium

Focal Point Meeting of the Group of Annex IV Countries

25-29 September

Damascus, Syria

Consultations on the launching of TPN4 Asia (Water resources)

26-27 September

The Gambia

Forum on the NAP to CCD

(continued)

and diseases (for example, public education systems; vaccination programmes; health-care system capacity, accessibility and organisation; disaster response capacity; and food reserves and food distribution systems).

Although further research is necessary, there is sufficient evidence that droughts and desertification negatively influence human health. In areas affected by desertification, health policies need therefore to be fully integrated into programmes to combat desertification.

The health impacts of desertification can be divided into malnutrition and famine, water borne diseases, other infectious diseases, respiratory diseases and burning injuries.

1. Malnutrition and famine

Desertification and drought affect food production, resulting in malnutrition, hunger, and often famine. Although over the past three decades world food production has increased at a greater rate than has population, hunger persists and is increasing in some countries. According to FAO, "There has been no improvement since the last count: 826 million people still do not get enough to eat in a time of unprecedented plenty".

In Africa, the number of malnourished people has increased in absolute numbers, and in many countries as a percentage of the population as well. Some 49% of the 10 million annual deaths among children under five years of age in the developing world are associated with malnutrition.

Malnutrition affects all age groups across the entire life span (Table 1), with a profound influence on growth, development, morbidity and mortality. Malnutrition related to desertification, drought and poverty implies, among other effects, protein-energy malnutrition, intrauterine growth retardation, and deficiencies of several micronutrients, such as iron and Vitamins A and C. Effects include growth and development retardation, major susceptibility to infections, blindness and anaemia.

Maternal malnutrition is the major determinant

of intrauterine growth retardation (IUGR) in developing countries. Maternal anaemia, gastrointestinal and respiratory infections, malaria and cigarette smoking are also important etiological factors. IUGR demands urgent attention for the significantly increased risks it implies not only for the child's health (for example, increased malnutrition, morbidity, mortality, poor cognitive and neurological development), but also for the adult, increasing the risk of certain diseases (for example, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, obstructive lung disease, diabetes and renal disease).

IUGR also reinforces the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition, poverty and disease with enormous costs in terms of failed and unachieved human and socio-economic development potential.

Even moderate malnutrition can, when long lasting, prevent the normal development of children's brains. Poverty forces many children to drop out from school, and hunger will disadvantage the learning process of those still in the school. When the normal growth of pelvic bones by girls is disturbed, future childbirth can become extremely risky.

Malnutrition weakens the body's resistance to diseases. Several kinds of famine-related death are caused by infectious diseases that the victim's emaciated body is unable to resist. Measles, for example, is still a major cause of mortality in undernourished populations. Outbreaks of beriberi, pellagra and scurvy still occur among the extremely poor and underprivileged.

The most common deficiency syndrome in populations affected by food emergencies is caused by the lack of vitamin A. Ocular signs of vitamin A deficiency — known as xerophthalmia — include night blindness and Bitot's spots in the earlier stages. Xerophthalmia progresses to corneal xerosis, ulceration and scarring, and eventually blindness. Signs of xerophthalmia were detected in 7% of the children surveyed in one region of Somalia during the drought of 1986-1987; 2.1% in drought-affected Niger in 1985; and 2.7% in a region of Mauritania in 1984. Data suggest that vitamin A deficiency is linked with high childhood mortality.

Table 1: Malnutrition across the life span, by disorder and consequences (WHO, 1999)

Life Stage	Common Nutritional Disorders	Main Consequences
Embryo/fetus	Intrauterine growth retardation (IUGR); Iodine deficiency disorders (IDD); Folate deficiency	Low birth weight ; Brain damage; Neural tube defects; Stillbirths
Neonate	Low birth weight ; IDD	Growth retardation; Developmental retardation; Brain damage; Early anaemia
Infant and young child	Protein-energy malnutrition (PEM) ; IDD ; Vitamin A deficiency (VAD); Iron deficiency anaemia (IDA)	Continuing malnutrition; Developmental retardation ; Increased risk of infection; High risk of death; Blindness ; Anaemia
Adolescent	PEM, IDD, IDA ; Folate deficiency ; Calcium deficiency	Delayed growth spurt ; Stunted height; Delayed/retarded intellectual development; Increased risk of infection; Blindness; Anaemia; Inadequate bone mineralization
Pregnant and lactating women	PEM, IDD, BAD, IDA; Folate deficiency; Calcium deficiency	Insufficient weight gain in pregnancy; Maternal anaemia; Maternal mortality; Increased risk of infection; Night blindness; Low birth weight/high-risk death rate for fetus

Source: WHO, 1999

During the droughts in Somalia in 1987 clinical signs of vitamin C deficiency, as evidenced by swollen, bleeding gums and swollen joints, were detected in 3.6% of the children in the Bay region.

Iron deficiency is the world's most widespread nutritional disorder, affecting both industrialized and developing countries. In the former, iron deficiency is the main cause of anaemia. In developing countries it is also associated with other nutrient deficiencies (folic acid, vitamin A, B12), malaria, intestinal parasitic infestations (especially hookworm, schistosomiasis and amoebiasis), and chronic infections such as HIV. In the poorest populations, where the usual diet is not only monotonous but also based on cereals which are low in iron and contain high levels of absorption-inhibitors, iron stores are characteristically low, particularly in young children and pregnant women.

Animal health deserves a short reference, considering its high importance in the livelihood of most dryland peoples. Water problems affect herds, and therefore human well-being and health. For example, livestock herds were decimated due to land degradation and drought in the Saharo-Saharan zone between 1968 and 1973. Effects persist even if abundant rains return, as subsistence farmers were forced to deplete their stock of seed for the following year, and huge numbers of draft animals had to be slaughtered or had starved.

2. Water and food borne diseases

A 1997 WHO assessment estimated that inadequate water and sanitation contributed to 5.3% of global mortality. About 1.1 billion people do not have access to clean water, and 2.9 billion to sanitation – a number projected to increase to 3.3 billion this year. Eighty percent of these people live in rural areas.

The drying of water sources forces people to use heavily polluted water, leading to severe epidemics. Water-related disease can be divided into four categories: faecal-oral, water-washed, water-based and disease spread by water-related vectors. In particular, desertification and droughts can increase faecal-oral diseases and water wash diseases. Faecal oral diseases spread via water or food contaminated with faecal material. They include cholera, typhoid, Hepatitis A and diarrhoeal diseases. Diarrhea still represents an important potential source of morbidity and mortality in an undernourished population, and is particularly evident in drought-affected countries. The spread of water-wash diseases from one person to the other is exacerbated by the lack of water for personal hygiene. They include skin and eye infections such as impetigo and trachoma.

The Aral Sea zone of Central Asia offers another example of the consequences for health, the economy, and employment that result from water scarcity, pollution and salinization, and from the destruction of what used to be a natural barrier against the drying effects of winds. Public water supplies in the disaster zone are unreliable and unsafe, mainly because of bacteriological contamination. Life expectancy in the disaster zone as a whole is 1.8 years below that of surrounding nations, and in districts

near the sea, the difference is nine years.

Last but not least, territories subject to erosion and wind might experience sudden flooding. The health impacts of flooding are not taken into consideration in this review.

3. Other infectious diseases

3.1. It is apparent that the sub-Saharan meningococcus meningitis belt is enlarging its southern borders. Meningococcal disease is a contagious bacterial illness with very high fatality rates, and is spread by person-to-person contact through the respiratory droplets of infected people. The highest number of cases occurs in sub-Saharan Africa in an area referred to as the meningitis belt. Epidemics occur in seasonal cycles between the end of November and June, depending on the location and the climate of the area, and then decline very rapidly with the arrival of the first rain.

3.2. The seasonal migration of families and workers to urban areas during dry seasons is very common in African sub-Saharan countries. These migration patterns lead to the easy spread of communicable diseases such as AIDS. Drought periods, seasonal dry seasons, food shortages and finally desertification often lead to an increase in the migration flow, as well as to changes in destinations. The health effects of this process should be further analyzed with respect both to the populations in destination areas, and the groups that remain in their areas of origin.

3.3. Migration has been recognized as an important cause of malaria resurgence in Africa and Eastern Europe. Epidemics of malaria are subject to rapid increases in incidence, usually related to season and population movements. Epidemics can result from population movements of the non-immune into malarious areas, either in search of temporary work, or into new frontier settlements.

The Sahel is the only dryland in the world to have experienced a long drought, with a 21% decline in annual rainfall over the past 100 years. Not only is there a trend towards less rainfall, but rainfall has become less predictable, with an increased variability in interannual rainfall in 1961-1990 compared with 1931-1960. In this framework, malaria prevalence in Sahelian countries appears to be in decline but is likely to become unstable, with epidemics occurring in years with excessive rainfall.

3.4. Emergency situations, such as prolonged droughts, may lead to heavy population movements. They cause the young and the old in particular to suffer stress and death. A study of 42 refugee populations from 1984-1988 shows acute protein energy malnutrition (PEM) prevalence and crude unadjusted monthly mortality (CMR) rates, and a strong positive association between the two. Overcrowding of shelters and basic services such as sanitation and water supply, contact with, and/or introduction of new diseases or disease vectors, may lead to outbreaks or cases of communicable diseases such as typhus, typhoid fever, cholera, diarrhoeal diseases, eye and skin infections.

(Cont. on page 7)



2000

27-29 September
Copenhagen, Denmark
Start-up Workshop on Desertification Information System for the Mediterranean
29 September
Praia, Cape Verde
Round-Table on NAP implementation

2-4 October
Mombasa, Kenya
Consultative Meeting of IGAD and SADC sub-regions on partnership agreements

9-13 October
Nairobi, Kenya
IGAD Sub-regional meeting on the implementation of the SRAP and NAPs

16-19 October
San Salvador, El Salvador

20-21 October
San Salvador, El Salvador
Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Consultative meeting on partnership agreements

22-24 October
Algiers, Algeria
4th Regional Meeting of Africa in preparation for COP-4

25-26 October
Algiers, Algeria
Workshop on resource mobilization in Northern Africa

Thematic Programme Networks

Thematic Programme Networks (TPNs), particularly in Africa and Asia, are an effective operational framework to facilitate the implementation of the Convention at the regional level through co-ordination, collaboration and action on selected, priority issues of particular relevance within the CCD framework.

In Africa, a TPN for the "Integrated Management of international river, lake and hydrogeological basins of Africa" was launched in Ghana, from 29 November-1 December 2000. The Regional Coordinating Unit of Africa invited African specialized institutions, international agencies and bilateral partners to meet and adopt a work programme and related timetable, define practical modalities for collaboration and identify tasks and roles of each partner.

The network aims at providing a framework for the coordination and exchange of experiences among water basin organizations of various subregions of the continent, in order to promote action in hydro-agricultural components and integrated development programmes of the great water basins for the benefit of the desertification control and/or mitigation of the effects of drought.

Further to the above, five additional TPNs will be launched in the framework of the Regional Action Programme, each of them addressing an issue of major concern for the region, as identified at the Panafrican Conference on the implementation of the UNCCD held in Burkina Faso (March 1997). The themes include the following: Agroforestry and soil conservation; Rational use of rangelands and development of fodder crops; Ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems; Promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies; Sustainable agricultural farming systems.

Seven related thematic workshops already took place between 1998 and 1999. Six thematic focal points were designated by the Ministerial Segment of the Third Regional Africa Conference (Nairobi, Kenya, 1999). The first consultative meetings were held in Bonn, Germany, in March 2000, to define the operational framework of the TPNs, as well as their standards, goals and activities.

Within the framework of the RAP for Asia, six TPN areas were identified at the Beijing Ministerial Conference on Regional Co-operation to Implement the UNCCD in Asia (May 1997), on the basis of decisions agreed upon at the first CCD Asian Regional Conference (India 1996).

TPN1 (Desertification monitoring and assessment) was officially launched in July 1999 and is

hosted by China. Further to an expert consultation meeting in Tokyo, in June 2000, decisions were made on specific programmes and distribution of tasks among participating countries on a continuous basis that would lead to the production of a regional desertification map.

TPN2 (Agroforestry and Soil Conservation), hosted by India, was launched in March 2000. The network aims at supplementing the ongoing national efforts in the region to develop sustainable agriculture in arid and semi-arid zones without jeopardizing fragile ecosystems. The network will facilitate information and technical know-how exchanges as well as regional co-operation.

Launching of TPN3 (Rangeland Management and Sand Dune Fixation) is scheduled by early 2001 in Iran. The network will aim, inter alia, at improving the productivity of rangelands and controlling land degradation in arid and semi-arid regions. So far, seven countries in the region have already officially expressed their interest in participating.

Finally, preparations are underway also for the three remaining Asian TPNs, which address Water resources management (in Syria), Strengthening capacities for drought impact management and desertification control (in Mongolia), and Integrated local area development (in Pakistan).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the RAP comprises projects that, while not formally described as TPNs as is the case in Africa and Asia, focus on specific subjects or themes and are based indeed also on networking. The entire region participated in their development and implementation. The Regional Coordinating Unit and Regional Executive Committee are responsible for regional co-ordination.

Such projects include, for example, the development of a regional information network (DESELAC) to facilitate, among others, the speedy and effective sharing of relevant information on policies to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. The DESELAC information network was launched in 1998 and covers 90% of the LAC countries.

The harmonisation of public policies to combat desertification is another key project within the RAP framework. It will be launched as a pilot project in 2001 in 6 countries (Barbados, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic). Furthermore, a number of sub-regional projects have been developed.

The principle of developing thematic networks was also approved by Annex IV countries at the ministerial meeting in Murcia, Spain, in June 2000. □

(Cont. from page 6)

4. Respiratory diseases and burning injuries

Drought increases the susceptibility of some forests and rangelands to fires. Widespread bush fires in Australia during 1983 were particularly attributable to the preceding drought. In 1997, uncontrolled forest fires burned the Indonesian states of Kalimantan

and Sumatra in combination with a severe regional drought and depressed mixing heights and prevailing winds, resulting in a regionally severe air pollution episode of biomass smoke in several Southeast Asian nations. This biomass burning causes acute and chronic respiratory diseases. However, very high levels of biomass smoke might cause infant mortality and the development of chronic lung disease in adults. Acute exposure to fires can lead to burning injuries and multiple fractures. □

Events

30 October – 4 November

*N'Djamena, Chad
International Seminar on
Combating Desertification,
Freshwater Resources and
Rehabilitation of Degraded
Areas in Drylands*

7-8 November

*Bangkok, Thailand
Third Regional Meeting of the
CCD National Focal Points in
Asia*

9-10 November

*Bangkok, Thailand
Regional Workshop on
Approaches to Resource
Mobilization for the UNCCD*

29 November - 1 December

*Accra, Ghana
Launching meeting for TPN on
Integrated Management of
International River, Lake and
Hydro-geological Basins in
Africa*

4-7 December

*Rome, Italy
Workshop on Drylands Land
Degradation Assessment
(LADA)*

11-22 December

*Bonn, Germany
Fourth session of the
Conference of the Parties of
the CCD*

12-13 December

*Bonn, Germany
Round Table of
Parliamentarians in
connection to the COP-4*

Preparations launched for Sub-regional Action Programme for the Aral Sea Basin

The Sub-regional Action Programme to Combat Desertification (SRAP/CD) in the Aral Sea Basin in the context of the UNCCD should be ready for discussion and adoption at an International Conference on the SRAP/CD for Central Asia in the second half of 2001.

This was the main decision taken at the July 2000 meeting in Kyrgyzstan, convened at the request of five Central Asian country Parties to the UNCCD with the purpose of launching preparations for the SRAP/CD. The Ministerial segment highlighted the need to launch appropriate and broad consultations that would form an integral part of the preparatory process.

Sub-regional action programmes are meant to encourage transboundary cooperation and to harmonize, complement and increase the efficiency of the respective National Action Programmes for combating desertification. In this framework, the Kyrgyzstan meeting identified the following as possible areas to be covered by the SRAP/CD: Monitoring and assessing desertification processes and conducting

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA); Improving the use of water in agriculture and combating erosion, salinization and swamp formation; Agroforestry and forest resources management on the plains and in the mountains; Watershed management; Rangeland management; Nature and biodiversity conservation including the development of eco-tourism; Involvement of communities in natural resources management; Scientific cooperation in the sub-region; Awareness raising, information management and training programmes; Institutional strengthening of national coordinating bodies (including non-governmental representatives); and Harmonisation of policy and legislation.

The Aral Sea Basin comprises five Central Asian states: Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and a major part of southern Kazakhstan. The scale and complexity of the environmental problems of the region, including health and social problems, require cooperation among the states of the region and with the international community. □

Information System launched for the Mediterranean

A start-up workshop for a Desertification Information System to Support National Action Programmes in the Mediterranean (DIS/MED) took place in Copenhagen, Denmark on 27-29 September. The event was hosted by the European Environmental Agency (EEA).

DIS/MED is a fully demand-driven project, facilitated by the UNCCD, further to the recommendations of a preliminary meeting held in Marrakech, Morocco, at the end of 1998 at the request of the Government of Italy.

The overall goal of DIS/MED will be to offer to decision-makers the possibility of taking measures and adopting appropriate policies to effectively combat desertification on the basis of the production and availability of new knowledge, indicators and information.

The participants to the start-up meeting included representatives of eight Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries as well as of international organi-

zations notably the European Union, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), and the Arab Maghreb Union.

The workshop addressed the following issues: project objectives and approaches; interested partners, the institutional framework, and synergies with other initiatives; the system's structure and operational mechanisms; and activities and commitments by partners and other stakeholders.

The next workshop (tentatively scheduled for spring 2001, in Egypt) will address information requirements for the elaboration and implementation of National, Sub-regional and Regional Action Programmes.

The European Union, the EEA and the OSS informed participants they would offer their support to the DIS/MED in terms of expertise and know-how. Participants highlighted the need to identify further supporters of the project, currently sponsored by the Italian Government. □



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