

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DESERTIFICATION

A. INTERNAL EU DESERTIFICATION RELATED POLICIES

Drought³⁷ and deforestation are two of the major causes of desertification in Europe³⁸.

1. Forest policy of the EU

Forests cover about a third of the European Union land area and even though there is no common Community forest policy, forests can contribute substantially to and be affected by Community policies on the environment, in particular climate change and biodiversity, as well as policies on rural development, renewable energy, water policy, research, industry, development cooperation, trade, public procurement and others.³⁹

The EU also adopted a *Forest Action Plan*⁴⁰ on 15 June 2006. It builds on the report on implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy and consequent conclusions by the Council.

The Action Plan focuses on four main objectives:

- (1) to improve long-term competitiveness
- (2) to improve and protect the environment
- (3) to contribute to the quality of life
- (4) to foster coordination and communication.

Eighteen key actions are proposed by the Commission to be implemented jointly with the Member States during a five year period (2007–2011).

Key actions, relevant to the fight against desertification include:

- Facilitating EU compliance with the UNFCCC obligations on climate change mitigation and its Kyoto Protocol and encouraging adaptation to the effects of climate change
- Contribution towards achieving the revised Community biodiversity objectives for 2010 and beyond
- Working towards a European Forest Monitoring System
- Enhancing the protection of EU forests.

Based on these key actions, the European Commission will:

- work towards the further development of the *European Forest Fire Information System*
- carry out a study which will analyse the main factors influencing the evolution of forest condition in Europe (including forest fires), the efficiency of current Community instruments and measures for forest protection and potential future options to improve the efficiency of the measures
- encourage Member States to form groupings to study particular regional problems with the condition of forests
- support research on protection of forests and phytosanitary issues under the 7th Research Framework Programme.

In addition, with support from the EARDF and the Life+ instrument, the Member States may:

- develop national afforestation guidelines and promote afforestation for environmental and protective objectives
- promote agroforestry systems
- promote Natura 2000-forest measures
- promote schemes for forest owners to engage in voluntary environmental commitments
- promote investments which enhance the ecological value of forests
- support forest fire prevention measures
- support restoration of forests damaged by natural disasters and fire

³⁷ For EU drought related policies please see Chapter V. of this report.

³⁸ UNCCD publication, available at: http://www.unccd.int/publicinfo/pressrel/showpressrel.php?pr=press21_08_03a

³⁹ DG ENV, forests: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/home_en.htm

⁴⁰ The text of the Forest Action Plan is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action_plan/com_en.pdf

- support studies on the causes of forest fires, awareness raising campaigns, training and demonstration projects
- review and update broader protection strategies against biotic and abiotic agents, including studies on risk assessment in relation to harmful organisms and invasive species.

2. Deforestation and climate change

One of the biggest threats to deforestation and drought in Europe is climate change. Deforestation is responsible for approximately one quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions whereas healthy forests have the capacity to remove carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere, thus mitigating climate change, as well as influencing water cycles and reflectivity of the earth's surface.

The Working Group on forest related sinks, set up in 2002 under the European Climate Change Programme (ECCP), has produced a report that outlines measures most likely to increase the contribution of forests in mitigating climate change. Forest-related actions will also be launched in the second phase of the 2005 ECCP⁴¹.

3. Lessons learned and good practices

Harmonised information on forest is needed to fulfil Commission and Member States' commitments under international agreements and to implement EU Directives, such as Natura 2000, the Water Framework Directive and the Plant Health Directive.

The European Commission, together with the Member States and relevant international organisations, will work towards establishing a European Forest Monitoring System that draws on existing forest databases and monitoring systems. A coherent system based on existing and soon-to-be available data collection schemes, expertise of the Member States, the European Commission (Joint Research Centre, Eurostat), the EEA and international organisations (e.g. UNECE, FAO) is the best way to meet the reporting needs for both scientific and policy purposes and a European Forest Data Centre is to be established by the Joint Research Centre for this purpose. Forest monitoring will not be limited to environmental indicators but will also include economic and social information, however monitoring could be expanded to cover the indicators endorsed at the 4th Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE).

4. Trends and emerging issues

The Forest Focus monitoring scheme expires in 2006 and support will shift to EU-level environmental monitoring under the new LIFE+ instrument over the 2007-2013 period.

B. EXTERNAL EU DESERTIFICATION RELATED POLICIES

Land degradation is not a mere environmental problem: it is also a driver of economic loss and stagnation, poverty, insecurity and migration. In most countries, a high proportion of income, employment and export earnings stem from agricultural production and other land-based activities. Despite growing urbanisation, the majority of poor people still live in rural areas. In the absence of significant economic diversification, access to land and the sustainable management of natural resources are preconditions for improving the livelihoods of poorer groups. They are also a precondition for greater social security. Land degradation abatement is therefore of importance to prevent and alleviate poverty, ensure local food security and for agricultural growth. It is a means to avoid conflicts over scarce resources and to cut migration from rural areas to over-crowded cities. In the face of climate change and climatic variations, investment in land-use based coping strategies by local populations is a matter of survival. As confirmed by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, land policy lies at the heart of economic and social life in all countries.

1. EC help in fight against desertification

⁴¹DG ENV, forests and climate change: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/climatechange.htm>

The EC is channelling its efforts for sustainable land management worldwide first and foremost by engaging dialogue and bilateral development co-operation assistance through the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

In doing so, the EC considers the importance of the UNCCD in poverty alleviation and for attaining the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

The Community also supports programmes promoted by non-governmental actors that both directly and indirectly support UNCCD objectives. The EC believes that the UNCCD will be most successfully implemented through effective mainstreaming of sustainable land management issues within the strategies of partner countries.

As stated in its last report⁴² reviewing the policies, financial instruments and projects of the European Community have contributed to the implementation of the UNCCD in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe, Mediterranean and Middle East Region, in terms of resource mobilisation. Between 2001 and 2005 the EC has , provided an estimated €338 M to some 128 projects that address issues covered by the UNCCD in the regions mentioned. This funding has been provided through different sources (geographic and thematic).

A similar exercise was carried out for Africa in November 2004⁴³ and concluded that the EC financial support provided through the available sources of funding (geographic and thematic) to programmes and projects addressing the issues covered by the UNCCD in the period 2000-2003 in Africa, amounted to €631 M in over 189 projects.

The UNCCD puts strong emphasis on participatory processes and the creation of an enabling environment, which enhances action at local level.

The EC interactions with civil society organisations on desertification related issues are now systematic and regular. The European platform on desertification (eniD) is the European umbrella organisation of NGOs involved in Sustainable Land Management. In 2006, the EC approved a significant grant for the project "DryNet" proposed by eniD and aimed at equipping civil society networks with the right knowledge and visibility so to address dry, degradation and poverty issues in the context of strategic development frameworks and the UNCCD.⁴⁴

2. Forest Law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT)

Illegal logging and trade in illegally logged timber is a major problem for many countries in the developing world. It causes serious environmental damage, costs governments billions of dollars in lost revenue, promotes corruption, undermines the rule of law and good governance and in some places, has financed armed conflict. It retards sustainable development in some of the poorest countries of the world. Consumer countries contribute to these problems by importing timber and wood products without ensuring that they are legally sourced. In recent years however, producer and consumer countries alike have paid increasing attention to illegal logging.

In 2003, the EU adopted an Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) to address these problems. This blends measures in producer and consumer countries to facilitate trade in legal timber and eliminate illegal timber from trade with the EU. The Action Plan sets out a range of measures to combat illegal logging. It supports improved governance in wood-producing countries and a licensing scheme to ensure only legal timber enters the EU. These elements will be implemented through partnership agreements to be negotiated with wood-producing countries. In addition, measures to provide incentives for good practice are also proposed, including the use of green public procurement policies, measures to promote responsible investment and encouragement for complementary private sector initiatives based on principles of corporate social responsibility.

⁴² European Commission- Report on activities undertaken and support provided, by the European Community to combat desertification in countries in Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe in the period January 2001 – December 2005- March 2007

⁴³ European Commission Report on activities undertaken by the European Community in support of the African region in the period January 2000 – December 2003 in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification - Final Report November 2004

⁴⁴ Please find more information on "Drynet" by case studies later on.

One of the cornerstones of the FLEGT Action Plan, are Voluntary Partnership Agreements with producer countries suffering from problems of illegal logging and poor forest governance. The VPA aims to use the incentives and influence of the EU market to help partner governments in the fight against illegal logging and weak governance. Negotiations are underway in Malaysia, Indonesia, Ghana and Cameroon. There is growing interest in the FLEGT partnerships and many more countries have expressed interest in discussions for VPAs (including Liberia, Congo, Gabon, Central Africa Republic, Ecuador, Guyana and Vietnam). The decision to enter a partnership agreement is voluntary but once agreed, all exports to Europe will require a licence which verifies the legal origin of the forest product.

The FLEGT partnerships represent a delicate balance between different interests. In part, they are a mechanism to ensure only legally harvested timber enters the European Union. However their credibility with NGOs and the development and human rights community concerned with governance and poverty also rests on their ability to promote an agenda of positive change for forest governance reform and improved management. They provide an opportunity to address indigenous people's rights and weaknesses in existing legal and regulatory frameworks. However, such reforms would be guided by the ambition of partner governments who clearly retain sovereignty to determine their law.

Funding for FLEGT-related projects has been provided through the Tropical Forest budget line, European Development Fund, national indicative programmes and other development cooperation instruments.

3. Regional Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) Processes

Concern over the problem of illegal logging is not limited to Europe. There is strong consensus at international level, expressed in the attention devoted to addressing this problem at the G-8, OECD and other international fora over the past few years. The EU maintains a high level political dialogue on illegal logging with US, China, Japan, India and other major consumer markets, to learn from the experience of others and to share the experiences of the implementation of FLEGT Action Plan. One important forum for these discussions has been regional Ministerial meetings aimed at building the political will in producer countries. The Commission has played an active role in these regional political processes in East Asia (EAFLEG), Africa (AFLEG) and Europe and North Asia (ENAFLEG). Efforts are now underway to promote dialogue on improving law enforcement and governance in Central and South America. The World Bank has played an important role in facilitating these processes and their follow up has received grant support from the Commission.

4. Lessons learned and good practices

In 2005, on the basis of a report by the UN Joint Inspection Unit on the UNCCD Secretariat, parties to the UNCCD developed a ten-year strategic plan for the UNCCD in the context of development.

After a decade since its entry into force, it has been recognised that various limiting factors have prevented the optimal performance of the convention.

The results of reform efforts, following the presentation of a draft report by the Group tasked by the Conference of the Parties (CoP), are to be discussed by parties at CoP8 in September 2007 in Madrid. The need to strengthen implementation of the UNCCD has already been flagged as one of the most pressing requirements.

The EC is convinced of the urgency to finalise such a shared strategic action plan with time-bound targets in order to strengthen the commitment of all actors towards the UNCCD objectives. Such a tool would, inter alia, bolster the mobilisation of resources for sustainable land-management activities.

The convergence on a limited number of implementation priorities, to be identified with the contribution of all UNCCD actors and institutions on the basis of existing scientific evidence worldwide, would be of great assistance to the Convention. Following good practice in sister conventions, UNCCD objectives will have to be tied to clear indicators and benchmarks at the international as well as country level, against which implementation progress can be measured.

The strategic plan provides a unique opportunity to revitalise the Convention and to address some of the UNCCD key challenges. It would also allow for the UNCCD to capitalise on its strengths, seize opportunities provided by the new policy and financing environment and create a new, revitalised common ground for all UNCCD stakeholders.

5. Trends and emerging issues

Securing productivity of land and related livelihoods of lower income groups in rural areas is becoming an imperative under the evolving conditions of climate change.

There appears to be a wider disconnect between formally stated progress in the implementation of the UNCCD and sustainable land management activities on the ground in affected regions.

Well known circumstances (that do not seem to have evolved much with time) are flagged as obstacles to Sustainable Land Management (SLM) in affected regions.

After 10 years, the UNCCD National Action Programmes (NAP) - i.e. the most important tool for UNCCD implementation at the national level – are, on the whole, still not effective due to a number of factors:

- they are not integrated into national planning frameworks, thus precluding the possibility of developing a strategic framework for public resource allocation
- internal changes needed to generate more effective policies to combat land degradation are, in general, overlooked. In theory, NAPs should be underpinned by harmonised policies but in practice there is no indication of how this should be achieved
- sectors are compartmentalised so that working on shared objectives becomes extremely complex
- lack of capacity, of technical and financial resources
- lack of an institutional and regulatory environment responsive to the needs of the poor or vulnerable groups (such as women that lack title to land or do not have other forms of collateral) and enabling activities promoting sustainable land management
- the UNCCD does not yet seem to have developed appropriate functions allowing upscaling at a significant level of the progress documented by fragmented individual countries' examples. Meaningful and documented geographical trends in the regions anchored on sound and reliable data are still lacking.

6. Case studies of a successful EU desertification related practices

6.1. Case Study: Dry – Net project

1. *Problem or issue addressed:* dryland degradation and poverty
2. *Name of the programme:* Dry-Net project
3. *Timeframe:* 2007 - 2009
4. *Status:* ongoing
5. *Main objectives:* to integrate environment issues in development cooperation frameworks through civil society action while reinforcing civil society capacity to participate effectively in sustainable land management policy discussions at international and lower levels
6. *Lead institution:* European Commission
7. *Other implementation arrangements and stakeholders involved:* various NGOs
8. *The results achieved* (if possible, please address the social, economic and environmental impacts of the programme): see text below
9. *The relationship of the programme to internationally agreed goals and targets:* Closely linked with the work of UNCCD, goal is to fight against dryland degradation.
10. *Link:* <http://www.dry-net.org/>

The Dry-Net project case study description:

Dry- net aims to strengthen civil society networks to address dryland degradation and poverty issues in the context of strategic development frameworks and the UNCCD.

Dry-Net⁴⁵ is a networking initiative that through an EC 2.5 M € grant, supports 14 NGOs working in 17 countries in the 2007-2009 period. It builds on the perceived need by NGOs to integrate environment issues in development cooperation frameworks through civil society action while reinforcing civil society capacity to participate effectively in sustainable land management policy discussions at international and lower levels.

⁴⁵ For more info please see <http://www.dry-net.org/>

Dry-Net is a capacity building effort that shall help bridge the gap between the dryland dimension, NAPs, cooperation frameworks and national development priorities. It shall also represent an open structure for exchange of positive project results and participatory methodologies.

Dry-Net is an attempt to forge answers to needs identified by CSOs in the past. It substantiates South-South and North-South cooperation with a global scope through:

- Mapping and analysing existing projects, donor coordination and UNCCD implementation identification and dissemination of best practices through national language newsletters
- radio programmes an internet database documentation and dissemination of relevant science and technology development results
- Training and development of NGO views on hot topics;

Activities are structured along six working areas supported by an action plan and clear operational tasks for all partners. It appears to be a very promising initiative that should stimulate and generate other similar experiences, linking with other stakeholders and generating momentum and replicate experiences in sustainable land management.