AUSTRIA

DESERTIFICATION
There are no deserts and no current threat of desertification in Austria.

In the area of **research**, Austria promotes the training of scientists and professionals from developing country Parties affected by desertification. Particularly noteworthy are the programmes concerning academic and practical training on mountain forestry at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna, on groundwater tracing methodologies and applications at Johanneum Research in Graz and on water ecology at the Institute for Limnology in Mondsee. Within the first mentioned programme an average of 6 students per year from developing countries receive grants covering study costs and livelihood expenses. Additionally Austria is providing regular support to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Centers, i.a. ICARDA, CIAT and ILRI. A substantial number of the supported programmes, which are implemented in partnership with Austrian research institutions, relate to desertification and focus on countries affected by desertification.

Austria is including UNCCD objectives in **public awareness and sensitization** programmes in Austria. On the occasion of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification various activities were organized like for example an exhibition on environment and security which included desertification issues and a panel discussion including international experts from IFAD and IUCN on desertification and conflict prevention. A folder on the International Year of Deserts and Desertification was published jointly by the Austrian Development Cooperation and UNIS Vienna.

Protection of sand dunes in Lower Austria
In the context of research in the field of desertification it shall also be noted that Austria undertakes research directed towards the preservation of specific deserted areas. Although such measures appear to be in contrast, or even opposed, to the objectives of the UNCCD, the fact that sand dunes are a valuable natural habitat that offers excellent living conditions for rare species requires their protection and preservation. Therefore, the Provincial Government of Lower Austria funded a comprehensive study and research project on the fauna and flora of the dune and drift-sand regions in Lower Austria. From the data gained, future measures for the management and preservation of sand habitats can be determined.

The dune and shift-sand regions of Lower Austria are considered to be among the most arid locations in the Austrian cultural landscape. On the one hand, this is caused by the pannonian influence on the climate of the area, on the other hand by the low capacity for water-storage of the sand. As the water supply is quickly exhausted after short periods without rainfall, predominantly drought-resistant plants which can also survive extreme heat, strong radiation and loose sand are able to thrive. Today, the characteristic grass biome of the sand regions is considered to be one of the rarest and most endangered types of vegetation in Austria as well as in Central Europe. Similarly, a high percentage of *aculeate hymenopterans* found in the area are threatened by extinction throughout Europe.

The sand dunes have for a long time been seen as a threat to agricultural development. As valuable sand habitats continue to be destroyed by afforestation and intensive agricultural usage, the situation - in view of environmental protection and the preservation of (endangered) species - calls for action. The study concludes that in order to prevent the extinction of species in dune regions in Austria several actions should be taken, among them increasing areas of open sand regions, converting particularly valuable sand regions that are

currently being used for agricultural purposes or for logging into sand-grass land, reducing the supply of nutrients into the soil, or the possibility of letting sediments shift in small areas.