

Drylands Programme

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The Convention to Combat Desertification: Guidelines for NGO Activity

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THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION: GUIDELINES FOR NGO ACTIVITY

Introduction

The purpose of this Guide is to describe the main elements within the Convention to combat Desertification, and to explain their importance for different people and organisations working in drylands development. It is aimed in particular at the many national NGOs involved in community-level activity in countries suffering from desertification, or dryland degradation. The Guide provides NGOs with suggested ways of getting involved in the Convention and encourages them to build on their wealth of experience to ensure that the ambitious goals and commitments outlined within the text can be achieved on the ground. In drawing up the Convention, many valuable lessons have been learned from NGOs, about how to promote more sustainable dryland management, which builds on local people's knowledge and needs. The particular contribution that NGOs might make to carrying out the Convention is clearly recognised in the text, in which governments are strongly encouraged to collaborate with NGOs.

A number of NGOs have also followed very closely the negotiations leading to agreement of this Convention, and made valuable inputs into the debate. They have highlighted, for example, the importance of maintaining a local level focus to combatting desertification, and the need to establish clear mechanisms for ensuring people can participate in decision-making.

The Guide starts in Section I with a short description of the Convention, and how it relates to other similar environmental agreements. It then outlines the nature of the commitments made by those signing the Convention, and provides a time frame for the likely follow-up to the convention.

Section II describes the contributions which NGOs might make in three main fields, drawing upon the NGO Plan of Action to combat desertification, and suggests particular actions in the following fields:

- * information & awareness raising;
- * preparation of National Action Programmes to combat Desertification; and
- * implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Section III concludes with information on who to contact, and ways to get involved. It encourages all NGOs to identify how best to work together, both among themselves, and with the other structures established to implement the Desertification Convention. Since the task is too great for any single NGO to undertake, NGOs need to join forces with their colleagues and plan together a programme of activities which will enable the commitments within the Convention to be put into practice. Since 17th June has now been designated World Desertification Day, some activities could be designed to coincide with this date.

The Guide's focus is on dryland Africa, since it was concern with Africa's particular difficulties which led to the Convention being proposed initially. This special emphasis on Africa has continued with the agreement in June 1994, by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-D) of a Resolution on Urgent Action for Africa. This resolution urges a rapid start-up of activities to deal with the pressures on dryland environments on this continent. Hence, although the Convention will not be put formally into operation for a couple of years, the Resolution provides a framework for countries to start to implement now the activities envisaged under the Convention.

SECTION I. BACKGROUND TO THE CONVENTION

Why was a Convention to combat Desertification drawn up?

Dryland regions of the world have always experienced very variable rainfall, with years of good harvests followed by years of crop failure. However, the severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in Africa, raised fears that dry areas would become less able to support life in future. Dryland plants and animals are often very resilient, and well adapted to rainfall variation. But there has been growing concern about increasing soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, and a general reduction in the diversity of plant and animal life within dryland areas, which would make people more and more vulnerable to food shortages.

During the preparations for the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, African governments called for a Desertification Convention, because they felt their particular needs were not being addressed. For many poorer countries in Africa, global environmental issues such as greenhouse gas emissions, tropical forests, and biological diversity were felt to be of less importance than improving food production and land management by farmers and herders. Hence, governments at Rio agreed to draw up an international convention which would focus particularly on African drylands.

In June 1994, the Convention to combat Desertification was agreed by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, made up of representatives from those governments which had taken part in the negotiations over the preceding year. The text of the main Convention is 32 pages long, and is divided into 40 Articles, each of which tackles a different topic, such as what is meant by 'desertification', the drawing up of national action programmes, and the role of research and technology. At the end of the Convention text, there are four annexes which focus on the particular needs of each of the following regions: Africa, Latin America, Asia, and countries to the north of the Mediterranean Sea. The regional annexe

for Africa is the most detailed, running to 19 pages. It provides guidelines for countries affected by desertification on how to plan more effective activities, and outlines the ways in which governments, donor agencies, local people, and NGOs could best work together.

The Convention is a legal document and, as a result, is written in a style and language which often seems very distant from the kind of problems faced by herders and farmers in the field. This Guide 'translates' some of the main commitments into which governments will enter when they become Parties to the Convention, and describes the various sections of most relevance to NGOs wanting to play their part in implementing the Convention. If you want to receive a full copy of the Convention text, contact a member of the international network of NGOs on desertification (RIOD), or write to the INC-D Secretariat in Geneva (see Section III for full addresses). From RIOD you can also obtain a copy of the NGO Action Plan on Desertification.

What is a convention?

There are many international conventions covering a very broad range of subjects, from human rights, and the treatment of prisoners of war, to trade in endangered species such as elephant ivory, and control of substances which reduce the ozone layer within the global atmosphere. In the field of the environment, there are now more than one hundred international conventions, of which that dealing with desertification is the latest to be agreed.

Conventions are negotiated by governments. They are aimed at gaining common agreement amongst countries about how to deal with a given problem. They usually involve each country giving up some of their power in order to achieve something considered of greater importance for the world community as a whole. Thus, conventions contain a number of commitments, or promises, which governments make about how they will behave in future. They agree to report on their actions, to ensure that every party to the agreement actually

carries out their promises. This reporting is to the 'Conference of the Parties', which is made up of representatives from all governments which have signed and ratified the convention.

Once the text of a convention has been agreed, governments must then choose whether or not they want to sign and ratify it. At the signing ceremony for the Desertification Convention in October 1994, 86 countries actually signed the Convention, and a further 10 governments have now done so. But this does not mean that the Convention is ready to operate. The text of the Convention notes that at least fifty countries must ratify the convention before it becomes legally binding. 'Ratifying' a convention involves each government passing this agreement through its own legal system at national level. This usually means the Convention must be discussed in the parliament or national assembly, and members of this assembly agree to the commitments enshrined within the Convention text. For some countries, this can take a long time. As a result, it may take until early 1997, before fifty ratifications have been achieved and the Desertification Convention can become fully operational.

However, there has been a sense of urgency about the need to address the difficulties being faced by dryland Africa, and an unwillingness to wait until the end of 1996 for action to begin. As a result, in June 1994, the Resolution on Urgent Action for Africa was agreed alongside the Convention text. This Resolution encourages African governments, donors and NGOs to start work now on what is planned within the Convention. This interim period between signature and the Convention's entry into force provides a very important opportunity for pilot activities to be undertaken. For example, certain countries have indicated their readiness to start preparing National Action Programmes to combat desertification right away. Experience from these first countries should provide very valuable lessons for others who will follow them later.

What is desertification?

There have been many different definitions of desertification over the last twenty years. This has led to much argument about whether or not desertification really exists, how it can be measured, and what are the best means for tackling the problem. Here, we take the definition agreed within the Convention, which states that:

"desertification" means land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities (Article 1)

Desertification is thus the same as dryland degradation. The two terms describe the gradual loss of productivity in soils and vegetation in dryland areas due to processes such as soil erosion and declining soil fertility. Human activities and climatic variations both have an important impact on dryland conditions. For example, while soil erosion occurs naturally, it can be greatly accelerated by poor farming practices. Heavy rainfall at the start of the wet season can loosen soil and carry it away, particularly when fields are bare and there are no contour terraces or bunds to stop the water from running away.

Many people have tried to abandon the term 'desertification' since it often makes people think of the desert advancing. Despite the commonly used *image of sand dunes invading farm land*, there is no evidence for the desert expanding. Instead, the frontier of the desert expands and contracts, depending on whether the rainfall has been bad or good in a given year. In Sahelian West Africa, for example, a drought year like 1984 brought desert-like conditions to many areas which normally can support crops and animals. In wet years, such as 1988 and 1994, the desert grows smaller, as grasses and shrubs germinate in areas which were formerly barren.

Dryland degradation does not involve moving sand dunes. Rather, it concerns the gradual impoverishment of agricultural and pastoral systems, which makes them less productive and more vulnerable to

drought.

Commitments within the Convention

The Convention contains many important commitments which governments promise to carry out. The most important of these are outlined in Box 1, below. They are divided into those which the governments of affected developing countries have promised to do, and those which apply to governments of donor countries.

Box 1. COMMITMENTS UNDER THE CONVENTION

Affected country parties undertake to give due priority to combating desertification ... and allocate adequate resources ... facilitate the participation of local populations ... provide an enabling environment ... prepare, make public and implement National Action Programmes ... These shall be sufficiently flexible ... provide for effective participation at the local, national, and regional levels of non-governmental organisations and local populations ... in policy planning, decision-making, and implementation, and review of National Action Programmes ... strengthening of decentralised government structures ... increase in participation of local populations and communities, including women, farmers, and pastoralists, and delegation to them of more responsibility for management ... encouraging initiatives and the assumption of responsibility by local communities ... to provide security of land tenure for local populations.

Developed country parties undertake to actively support ... the efforts of affected developing country parties ... provide substantial resources ... promote and facilitate access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how ... administrative and budgetary procedures that increase the efficiency of cooperation ... to avoid duplication, harmonise interventions and approaches ... strengthening scientific and technical capacities, information collection and analysis, and research and development ... developed country parties are encouraged to develop, on their own initiative, an informal process of consultation and coordination among themselves.

The preparation of National Action Programmes (NAPs) is at the centre of the Convention. Each affected developing country has promised to draw up such a programme, according to certain guidelines, described below. Donors have agreed to support National

Action Programmes and to coordinate all their activities more effectively. Other bodies, such as UN agencies and NGOs are requested to help prepare and implement NAPs, as shown in the Convention text. The Parties shall:

encourage NGOs to support the elaboration, implementation and follow-up of action programmes (Article 9.3) ... encourage NGOs to facilitate their participation and that of local populations in the policy planning, decision-making, implementation and review of programmes (Article 10.2f) ... seek the expertise of NGOs in the collection, analysis, exchange and dissemination of relevant information (Article 16d) ... establish mechanisms such as national desertification funds involving NGOs, to channel financial resources to the local level (Article 21d).

What is a National Action Programme?

The fundamental objective of a National Action Programme (NAP) is to help local people and organisations improve dryland resource management and deal with the effects of drought. It should thus outline how the government plans to achieve this, and the roles to be played by different people and organisations. NAPs are intended to be much more than a one-off planning document. They are meant to provide a flexible framework which evolves over time, according to changing needs. They should outline the strategy to be followed by the government, and the mechanisms by which to involve others in preparing and implementing the NAP.

The Convention clearly recognises that governments have only a limited role to play, and that they cannot hope to intervene themselves in many areas. Rather, the role of government is now seen as establishing a general setting which encourages ordinary people and organisations to do things themselves. This means people must feel confident of the benefits which they will gain from the activities they carry out. NGOs have an important role to play in making sure that

people affected by dryland degradation can become involved in deciding on the activities to be carried out.

NAPs will cover a number of areas, such as:

- * measures to improve institutional organisation, such as by delegating more power and responsibility to local communities, as has been proposed in a number of countries (examples include programmes of decentralised resource management, such as *gestion des terroirs* approaches from Sahelian West Africa)
- * changes to legislation, in fields such as land tenure, to provide land users with more secure rights over resources,
- * research and information work to understand better the underlying causes of dryland degradation and more effective means to address them,
- * drought monitoring and preparedness,
- * training activities in a large number of fields,
- * public awareness campaigns,
- * a list of projects for investment, with clearly identified priorities
- * changes to economic policies to provide better markets and incentives for farmers, and
- * mechanisms by which local people, NGOs and other groups can contribute to the definition and monitoring of NAP activities on a regular basis.

The international network of NGOs on desertification - RIOD - has drawn up a Plan of Action for NGOs, which provides useful guidelines about the contribution NGOs can make to supporting action envisaged under the Convention (see Box 2 for details).

How should these National Action Programmes be prepared?

The Convention provides guidelines on the preparation of NAPs. Since these programmes are meant to promote grassroots activities, preparation should encourage the participation of many different people and organisations in discussing what might be done and how.

What steps will be followed?

First, the government needs to set up a group of people who will be responsible for preparing and implementing the NAP. In some cases, a coordinating group like this may already exist, for example where the country is also preparing a National Conservation Strategy, or a National Environmental Action Plan.

Second, this coordinating body will need to assess other environmental plans and programmes that have been drawn up, to see whether desertification issues can be handled within existing plans. As mentioned above, many countries have already started drawing up other environmental plans, and it will be important to build on these, rather than starting to plan from zero again. However, many of these plans were not drawn up in a strongly participatory manner and, hence may need substantial re-direction if they are to meet the commitments made by States ratifying the Convention.

Third, it will be essential to run an information campaign, to let people know about the preparation of the NAP, and to encourage suggestions about how best this might be done. While the coordinating group will be involved in such a campaign, NGOs and other organisations will have a central role to play in encouraging debate and channelling ideas. This could be done through a range of awareness-raising activities, as proposed in the NGO Action Plan (see Box 2)

Fourth, NAPs are meant to be prepared through consultation with

local people and community organisations. This is to ensure that actions to be undertaken within the NAPs actually reflect the main concerns and needs of local land users. In the past, many projects and plans have been drawn up by governments and donor agencies without bothering to talk to the people who will be most directly affected. Luckily, many agencies and governments now recognise that this was a mistaken approach, and that they need to consult with local populations first. However, many are not clear about how to bring about people's participation nor the range of possible forms this might take. Some of these are described in Section II of this Guide and in the NGO Action Plan.

Fifth, a series of priority activities, identified during the consultation phase, will be pursued. These could include, for example, establishing a series of roundtables at local and national levels to discuss problems of land tenure and make proposals for providing more secure access to resources. Similarly, it could include the setting up of training courses for government and NGO staff on more participatory methods for working and planning with local people.

Sixth, the coordinating group will need to draw up a series of targets, or indicators, to try and assess whether progress is being made in carrying out the programme and achieving the longer term goal of combatting desertification. These should include simple indicators to provide local people with a way in which they can assess improvement or worsening in their situation.

Who will implement National Action Programmes?

The NAPs will identify a broad range of different kinds of activity, as described above. It must then be decided who will carry out the different tasks: what roles should be played by government, donor agencies, NGOs and local people and their organisations? The text of the Convention strongly encourages governments to allocate responsibility for many activities to other organisations, where appropriate. Thus, for example, while government needs to

coordinate any discussion of legislation over land, it could delegate others to carry out studies, organise meetings, and publish results from such a consultation. Where such a large number of different actors are involved, the role of the coordinating group becomes especially important in keeping of track of what is happening, and making the best out of the contributions made by different organisations.

SECTION II. CARRYING OUT THE CONVENTION

There are three main areas of activity outlined in the Convention where NGOs have a strong contribution to make:

1. Information & awareness raising;
2. Preparation of National Action Programmes to combat Desertification; and
3. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

NGOs need to discuss amongst themselves what benefits the Convention could bring to them and their partners, and role they wish to play in its implementation. The NGO Plan of Action to combat desertification outlines a range of activities which NGOs could usefully undertake together, to bring their combined strengths and skills to promote the provisions of the Convention (see Box 2 below).

Box 2. THE NGO PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

In November 1994, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, some 50 NGOs from all over the world agreed to establish the RIOD (Réseau international d'ONG sur la désertification). They also developed an Action Plan to outline the roles of NGOs might play in implementing the Desertification Convention.

Actions proposed under the Plan include:

- * Consultation between NGOs, community based organisations (CBOs) and local populations to create awareness of the Convention at all levels, and to ensure effective representation of local people's views within national decision-making processes;
- * Establishment of an NGO Forum on Desertification, involving NGOs, CBOs, and community leaders, to discuss the opportunities presented by the Convention, and identify how best to work with other organisations and structures;
- * Organisation of a National NGO Coordinating Committee on Desertification to coordinate NGO/CBO activities, linked to the national NGO federation, where such a body exists. The activities of this committee should include:
 - ... raising awareness of the Convention's provisions;
 - ... lobbying governments to ratify the Convention;
 - ... setting up mechanisms for community consultation;
 - ... selecting a national focal point for inclusion in the RIOD network;
 - ... compiling an inventory on successful approaches to tackling dryland degradation, and
 - ... lobbying in favour of a National Desertification Fund.

The Plan of Action also proposes a series of activities to be pursued by Southern and Northern NGOs to communicate more effectively to people in developed countries the particular difficulties associated with desertification, and the need to lobby for changes in donor country behaviour, where necessary.

a) The Convention should bring certain benefits to NGOs and the people with whom they work, such as a greater commitment from governments and donors towards tackling problems faced by dryland peoples, and agreement to follow an approach which focuses on local people's needs and perspectives. NGOs should find a greater willingness amongst donors to fund their activities, if they can demonstrate clearly that they work well with local people, help them achieve real improvements in welfare, promote their participation in the Convention process, and accurately represent their views.

b) While working with government and donor agencies, NGOs will probably want to maintain sufficient independence to provide an objective view of progress and constructive criticism as the NAP process develops. Ideally, work by NGOs should complement what is being done by government and other agencies. It would be best for NGOs to start, therefore, by contacting the coordinating unit responsible for the Convention to find out their own plans in each of these areas, and to offer NGO assistance in preparing the NAP. The NGO contribution can then be best targeted to fill gaps, provide additional information, and bring the special viewpoint of NGOs and the local people with whom they work. In some cases, however, NGOs may need to challenge the approach being taken by government, where for example they feel that the promises made under the Convention are not being kept. NGOs will then have to find ways of encouraging governments, donors and multilateral agencies to change their approach.

1. How can NGOs raise awareness about the Convention?

Knowledge about the Desertification Convention is mainly limited to those people who have been involved in the negotiations.

What is the Convention and how will it work?

Need: People need better information about the Convention, the

commitments made by different people, and the way in which National Action Programmes will be drawn up and implemented. This information should be made easily available to people in many different kinds of organisation, from the local to national levels.

Action: Start by contacting the coordinating unit to find out their plans in this field, and offer NGO support. If no such unit has been established, press the government authorities to do so. Following this, there may be a number of activities which NGOs could pursue.

For example:

- * Establish a joint NGO working group to put together a series of articles on the Convention, outlining its main components and the commitments of each side. You might want to include other people within the group, such as researchers who have good field-level experience. Make contact with the organisations noted in Section III of this Guide to gain access to further information and materials from which you might draw for your articles.
- * Use existing NGO channels and networks to disseminate what you have written, and identify a number of newspapers and magazines which would publish your articles.
- * Investigate opportunities for translating your article into local languages either for publication in a newspaper or for transmission by radio.
- * Encourage debate within your own organisation, and NGO meetings about the Convention.
- * If you run a field programme, go and discuss the Convention's objectives with local people and organisations. From this, you may get useful ideas about how to present the Convention in a way which is more comprehensible to people

who are not familiar with international negotiations.

- * Look for ways of getting information about the Convention to affected communities. There will be traditional ways of disseminating information and of holding discussions, which you could support.

- * Find ways of enabling local people to speak for themselves. For example, you might record interviews with farmers and herders about the kinds of problem they face, for use in articles, newsletters or radio programmes about the Convention.

What is desertification and how can it be tackled?

Need: people need a clearer understanding of what is meant by desertification, the nature of processes involved, and successful approaches to tackling dryland degradation.

Action: There is still much confusion about what is meant by desertification. It would help everyone concerned with implementing the Convention to have a clear statement and common understanding of the desertification problem, what processes this involves, and what seem to be promising ways of addressing these problems.

This could be done by a series of articles which address different issues.

- * A first article could clarify desertification, along the lines outlined earlier in this paper (see pages 4-5), explaining that desertification does not mean that the desert is advancing, but rather that land currently being used will become less productive unless it is carefully looked after.

- * A second article could provide information from projects which have developed effective ways of supporting farmers and

herders tackle dryland degradation. It would be best to highlight case studies from your own country, though you could also pick some examples from existing reports and books (see list of people to contact for information in Section III).

- * A third article could describe the ways in which national governments could contribute towards better dryland management.

- * A fourth might examine the role of outside donors, the problems they may have created and recommendations for change.

These articles could be published in various forms, such as newspapers, NGO bulletins, and briefing sheets. You should also think about how to provide information to local people in a form which is appropriate. Where possible, use traditional methods & structures. Some NGOs have been working with traditional theatre groups, who can put together a drama about the issues involved in carrying out the Convention. Plays acted out in the evening in the village square can generate a lot of debate and audience participation, by treating a particular topic - tackling land degradation - within a familiar cultural setting.

The consultation process - what happens, and when?

Need: to get the maximum contribution from different people and organisations, information is needed about the process by which a NAP will be prepared, the range of different activities and consultations to be carried out, the time frame involved - what will happen when? - who to contact for further information, and how to get involved.

Action: the coordinating unit should be developing its own information strategy in relation to the Convention, the preparation of NAPs, and processes of consultation envisaged. NGOs could provide a useful channel of information about the NAP preparation process to the

people and groups with whom NGOs are working. Possible options for NGO involvement include:

- * use of existing NGO information systems (newsletters, etc.) to spread information about the NAP process and how to get involved
- * setting up a newsletter to cover preparation of the NAP
- * discussion of the Convention and how best to contribute at project and district level.

However, it is important that NGOs not be thought of only as a means of channelling information from the top-down. NGOs also have important roles to play in providing an alternative view, which reflects the position of ordinary people outside government structures. NGOs can be instrumental in bringing these views from the bottom upwards, and feeding into national level debate.

2. Preparation of National Action Programmes to combat Desertification

The preparation of NAPs will need skilled people, to spread information, encourage participation and consultation, and facilitate reflection amongst the various people and organisations involved.

Training - a key element

Need: to develop training skills in how to promote participation in a range of governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Action: Training programmes are needed which can provide tools to enable a more effective sharing of ideas and information between local people and various outside agencies. Such approaches include methods like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which provides

both an approach and a series of tools to help local people analyze their problems and plan what to do.

- * find out which NGOs have particular skills in participatory training methods, such as PRA. Encourage contacts between these NGOs and the coordinating group, so that the latter can make use of available NGO training capacity.

Policy issues - joint analysis and reflection

Need: During preparation of the NAP, there will be several issues requiring further thought and reflection; for example, decentralisation, and how to provide people with greater security of tenure over their land. Debate on these issues can then be fed into any proposed changes to legislation and institutions identified during the NAP preparation.

Action: NGOs could set up a series of meetings to consult with fellow NGOs and the people with whom they work, to feed ideas into the debate. Ideally the national level coordinating committee should provide the opportunity for bringing people together to discuss important policy issues. However, NGOs may feel that critical issues are being ignored or treated superficially. In such cases, the NGO coordinating body can provide an alternative place for views to be heard and issues debated.

- * establish roundtables at district/national level to bring people together, around key issues
- * publish and distribute articles based on roundtable discussions, and drawing on case studies taken from NGO project areas.

3. Implementing National Action Programmes, Monitoring and Evaluation.

The main objective of the Convention and the NAPs is to provide a setting within which land users have a strong incentive to improve the management and productivity of their land. In some cases, herders and farmers are very skilled at making the best of their resources, investing time and effort in controlling erosion, improving levels of soil fertility, conserving vegetation. In other places, people may need access to outside ideas and skills to develop more appropriate means of managing their resources. NGOs have a very important role to play in supporting local people in their search for better means of looking after their land.

Box 3: KEY ELEMENTS OF GOOD PRACTICE

A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

- * Put local people's priorities first
- * Provide secure rights and gains for the poor
- * Adopt a flexible approach, and change course when needed
- * Seek committed & motivated staff
- * Work with local groups & institutions
- * Base interventions on skills and resources available locally
- * Training local people gives them new strengths

Field level projects

NGO experience with small scale projects has had a very important impact on approaches to rural development. In many parts of Africa, NGOs have shown clearly the need for a different kind of project, in which local people play the central role in deciding what should be done, and how. Governments and donor agencies have now adopted many elements from good NGO practice, to help design their own programmes better. Some of these key elements are outlined in the box above. There is one key lesson from Box 3:

outsiders - whether they are researchers, NGOs, government agencies, or donor programmes - need to find ways of working which builds on what local people know and can do themselves.

However, while NGOs have often been good at carrying out good local level projects, they are often weak in other important areas, such as cooperating with other projects, and reflecting on the broader framework within which they work. These weaknesses usually arise because NGOs focus their attention on single projects. Funding pressures may also force NGOs to spend all their time on demonstrating progress in their field level projects, rather than allocating scarce time and resources to meeting and discussing with other organisations. Funders are usually much more willing to put money into achieving physical targets, than into broader networking activities.

Encouraging collaboration

Need: Cooperation with other projects, to learn from each other, and avoid a duplication of activities, which wastes resources, and can provide very contradictory approaches. There are too many cases where different organisations set up projects in the same or neighbouring villages, without talking to each other or discussing how best to work together. Equally, many NGOs often try and avoid

working in collaboration with local government services, because NGOs want to maintain themselves separate from any involvement with government.

Action: closer collaboration at local, district, and national levels.

- * involvement in district level coordinating committees, and national NGO coordinating groups, to discuss how to harmonise project activities.

Setting the NGO contribution within a wider context

Need: Reflecting on the broader framework.

Action: Apart from direct involvement in field level projects, NGOs can also play a useful role in other fields. These include:

- * Research - more research could usefully be done to examine linkages between the management of resources in dryland regions, and certain key topics. This would not be academic research, but aimed at informing people involved in projects, and policy making, about what is actually happening, why, and how conditions might be improved. For example, based on their own experience, NGOs could show that farmers and herders have considerable skills and understanding of their environment, on which to build more effective systems of resource management. NGOs could usefully provide examples where projects have worked with local people to improve traditional techniques, such as ways of tackling soil erosion, or maintaining the fertility of their soil.

- * Training in participatory approaches - NGOs could reflect on what they mean by a participatory approach, how this can be achieved, and what training is needed to help those in NGOs, government, and donor programmes work more collaboratively with local people. Contacts could be made with existing

training institutions, and NGOs with experience of participatory training skills.

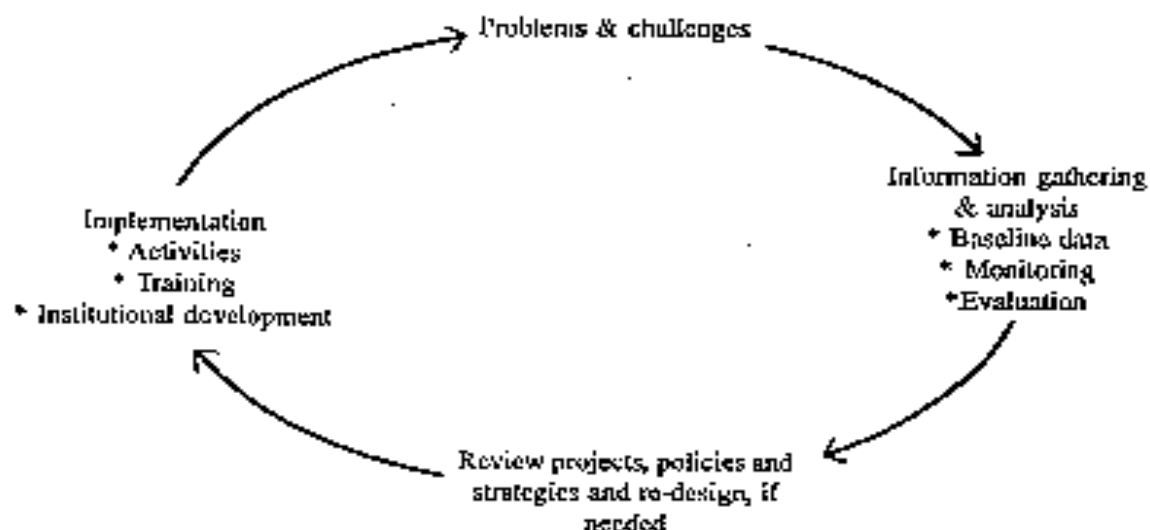
* Information and awareness raising - Currently, many people lack information about their civic rights and broader issues relating to the relationship between state and people. The text of the Convention outlines a substantial shift in how power should be exercised, with governments making a firm commitment to devolve areas of responsibility which it formerly claimed as its own. Work in several countries shows what is possible, such as translation of legal texts into local languages and in a form able to be read and discussed by local groups - sometimes as part of a literacy programme.

* Lobbying and advocacy - NGOs can play an important role in representing the interests of more marginal groups in society who have little access to those in power, nor means to make their views known through the media and other channels.

Monitoring and evaluation.

The NAP should become a long term process which is regularly monitored, by the government and other groups. Information from monitoring can then be fed back into the setting up of new activities and changes to existing policies.

Diagram 1: Monitoring and Evaluation - A Continuous Process



In this Guide we have adopted a three stage approach, starting with information and awareness raising; followed by preparation of NAPs; and finishing with implementation. In practice, however, these stages do not necessarily follow each other in a straight line. Instead, it would be better to follow a circular process (as shown in the diagram above). For example, information activities will be needed throughout, to assess progress made in meeting goals.

Fundraising.

NGOs have access to various funding sources - internal and external - which can supplement those available to national governments. Internally, NGOs have access to various funding sources - internal and external - which can supplement those for raising money, from self-financing schemes (eg. trading operations). However, NGOs in Africa tend to be heavily dependent on external funds, relying on support from international NGOs, and special funds created by bilateral and multilateral agencies.

NGOs currently provide a significant share of the funds allocated to development projects in Africa. Recent figures estimate at least 10% of all development funding to have come from the NGO sector. Over recent years, many Northern governments have shifted a substantial amount of money from direct government funding towards NGO support, and this trend is likely to continue. NGOs should, either directly or through donor country NGOs, approach donor governments that have signed or ratified the Convention, with clear plans showing how they propose to assist local people to benefit from the Convention.

In addition, the RIOD NGO network has put forward a number of suggestions regarding funding mechanisms, particularly the establishment of National Desertification Funds, oriented towards the financing of initiatives from local communities. These Funds would be constituted from contributions from many different donors and, hence, try and avoid the duplication and competitiveness which sometimes characterises the activities of donor agencies. Funds would be managed by a board composed of representatives from government, donors, NGOs, and community representatives.

SECTION 3: GETTING STARTED

The International Convention to combat Desertification provides an important opportunity for local people, governments, NGOs, and donor agencies to discuss ways to support more sustainable drylands development. NGOs have a very significant role to play in carrying out activities agreed under the Convention and, in particular, the National Action Programmes outlined in the text. This Guide has suggested a number of ways for NGOs to get involved in work related to the Convention. The RIOD network of NGOs has also developed useful guidelines for taking forward the actions envisaged under the convention. While continuing to carry out well designed field level projects, developed in collaboration with local people, NGOs should also broaden their contacts and range of activities. For example, the information and experience gained by NGOs at local level can be very

valuable for decision makers working at national and international levels. RIOD also provides a wider group within which NGOs can exchange views and compare progress with implementing the Convention in different countries.

Suggested action points:

- i. Start by contacting the government's coordinating unit, established to prepare the National Action Programme. Where this unit is located will depend on the country concerned, and whether the government is already engaged in preparing another environmental strategy. If the government has not yet set up such a unit, NGOs could usefully push for this to happen.
- ii. Discuss within the national NGO coordinating group how best to contribute towards the preparation and implementation of National Action Programmes to combat Desertification. Joint action by NGOs should ensure a far greater impact than each NGO acting in isolation.
- iii. Raise discussion about the implementation of the Convention and the role of NGOs within other structures in which you are involved, such as provincial or district level coordinating groups. NGOs are well placed to enable local people and their organisations to feed ideas and priority issues into national level process of elaborating the NAP.
- iv. Contact the International Network of NGOs on Desertification (RIOD) coordinated by Heinz Greijn at the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) in Nairobi, Kenya. Find out from them the name and contact details of a NGO network member in your region, from which you can gain further documents and information. Ask for a copy of the NGO Plan of Action to combat desertification.
- v. Get a copy of the Convention from the government coordinating unit, a member of the RIOD, or by writing to the Secretariat for the Desertification Convention, in Geneva (for address, see below).

vi. Discuss with your colleagues the suggested activities described in Section II of this Guide and the NGO Plan of Action, and plan together a series of NGO contributions to follow up signature of the Convention. A programme of activities could be focused around 17th June which has been designated World Desertification Day.

Addresses and details of whom to contact:

Ms Sylvia Jampies,
NGO Liaison Officer,
Secretariat for the Desertification Convention,
11 chemin des Anémones, BP 76,
CH 1219 Châtelaine,
Switzerland.
Tel: +41.22.979.9410 Fax: +41.22.979.9031

Heinz Greijn,
International Network of NGOs on Desertification (RIOD),
Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI),
PO Box 72461,
Nairobi, Kenya.
Tel: +254.2.562015/562022 Fax: +254.2.562175
e-mail: elci@gn.apc.org
Publishes a regular circular on follow up to the Desertification Convention and has established focal points in different regions of the world. Published eco newsletter during the negotiations.

Centre for our Common Future,
Palais Wilson,
52 rue des Pâquis, 1201 Geneva, Switzerland.
Tel: +41.22.732.7117 Fax: +41.22.738.5046
e-mail: commonfuture@gn.apc.org
Publishes The Bulletin. Issue 23, July 1994 devoted to the Desertification Convention.

Nancy McPherson,
Environmental Strategies Programme,
International Union for the Conservation of Nature,
rue Mauverney 28,
CH-1196, Gland, Switzerland.

Tel: +41.22.999.0001 Fax: +41.22.999.0002

e-mail: nmm@hq.iucn.ch

Developed National Conservation Strategies, which have been established in several African countries. These provide useful guidance on preparation and consultation methods for national environmental plans and programmes.

& Seydou Bouaré, IUCN Mali Office/Desertification Focal Point,
BP 1567, Bamako, Mali.

Drylands Programme,
International Institute for Environment & Development (IIED),
3 Endsleigh Street,
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Tel: +44.171.388.2117 Fax: +44.171.388.2826

e-mail: iieddrylands@gn.apc.org

Publishes a quarterly bulletin Haramata and Issue Papers which treat dryland management questions. Produces information on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and its french equivalent the Méthode active de recherche et de planification participatives (MARP).

Panos Media Briefings,
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Tel: +44.171.278.1111 Fax: +44.171.278.0345

e-mail: panoslondon@gn.apc.org

Publishes briefings on a range of environmental issues, including desertification.



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