

**DESERTS AND DIPLOMACY: NEGOTIATING
AND IMPLEMENTING UNITED NATIONS
CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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INDIA

2004



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

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NEW DELHI - 110067, INDIA

Centre for Studies in Diplomacy,
International Law and Economics

Date: 26 July, 2004

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “DESERTS AND DIPLOMACY: NEGOTIATING AND IMPLEMENTING UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION” submitted by **Sushil Kumar Jha** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is his original work and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or of any other university.

We recommend that the dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. Manoj Pant
(Chairperson)

Prof. Pushpesh Pant
(Supervisor)

*To my parents who taught me ...
...to love nature*

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Acknowledgement

This has been my endeavour to comprehend one of the gravest environmental problems the world is faced with. A number of people have extended their precious time and knowledge for me to grasp the subtle nuances of this problem so that I could better comprehend the issue and its linkages with other environmental problems of consequence. It would be impossible for me to acknowledge the debt to all and sundry. However, I must name a few of them to relieve my burden.

*I am truly indebted to my guide **Prof. Pushpesh Pant** who has remained a source of inspiration throughout the course of this study. No word of gratitude could ever repay the debt I owe to him. It would not be an overstatement to add that without him, this work would not have seen the light of the day. I am equally thankful to Dr. Indrajit Pant for taking pains in tolerating me and of course, my half-baked ideas about the topic. It is Dr. Pant's ideas, comments and suggestions that have opened me, quite literally, to the fascinating details of this topic.*

I extend my gratitude to my seniors especially Avilash Roul for extending his expertise on the bulk of this study and showering me with feedbacks. It would be unfair if I skip Mr. S. S. Tabraz who, despite his busy schedule with the books and the destinies of Israelis and Palestinians, gave me a patient hearing on a topic that was not one of his prime interests.

Thanks are due to the library staffs of Center for Science and Environment (CSE) and JNU, New Delhi.

I owe special debt to my parents and my brother's family in Delhi for their unwavering support and incessant inspiration.

I would like to thank some of my well wishers- Mrs. Swati Chuahan for lending me a laptop, Mrs. Seema Chishti and Renu Agal for dragging me to the table to complete this work, my roommate Ram Gopal Nitharwal for doing one of the most difficult aspects of any intellectual endeavour- typing the major part of this study. Finally, I have benefited from every quarter throughout the course of my study, however the shortcomings are entirely mine.

SUSHIL KUMAR JHA

(SUSHIL KUMAR JHA)

INTRODUCTION

On 17th June 2004 Secretary General of United Nations Kofi Annan appealed everyone “to make every day one on which we work to reverse the trend of desertification and set the world on a safer, more sustainable path of development.”¹ The day was 10th anniversary of United Nations Convention to combat desertification. The passionate appeal of Secretary General of the world’s supposedly most powerful body shows the severity of the problem of desertification. Desertification is one of the most dangerous problems human race is facing. Although its impacts are not as severe as those of bloody wars and other environmental disasters such as population, waste and climate change, the reach of desertification is such that it affects 11 percent of the total land area of the world.

Though there are only 13 to 17 deserts in the world, their extent is vast. From the Atacama in Latin America to Southwest deserts of United States to Kalahari, Sahara and Namib deserts in Africa to Thar in India. There are several deserts in Iran, Saudi Arab and in Turkmenistan too. The reach is as far as to China, the Takla makan and Gobi deserts are world famous. The seven percent of total land area are deserts. It spreads in 110 countries and affects one sixth of the world’s population.² According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report desertification costs the world \$ 42 billion in a year. Africa alone loses \$ 9 billion per year whereas Asia loses almost \$21 billion in a year. Europe loses \$1 billion while South America’s loss is \$ 3 billion and North America loses \$ 5 billion in a year.

The humanitarian impact of desertification is even worse. Over 135 million people may be in danger of being driven out of their land. The problem is most severe in Africa because of the climate and other socio-economic problems. In that too the condition of Sudan-Sahel region is worst. Nobody knows how many have already had to abandon their land because of desertification but the number is in millions. One sixth of the population of Burkinafaso has already been uprooted in this way. Partly as a result of this, urban slums are swelling. In

¹ www.unccd.int/publicinfo/statement/annan 2004. Php on 17th June 2004.

² UNEP, *Desertification Atlas*, Nairobi, Kenya, 1992, p. 3-5.

between 1965 to 1988 the proportion of Mauritania's people living in the capital rose from 7 percent to 41 percent while the proportion of those who were nomads fell from 73 percent to 7 percent.

Before delving into the details and other complicated aspects, it is useful to comprehend the term desertification. In common parlance as defined by Merriam Webster's dictionary, desertification is defined as, "the process of becoming a desert." According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), it is defined as "Land degradation in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid areas resulting from various factors including climatic variations and human activities."³ This is the definition which was finally agreed upon in 1992 Rio summit but since then, it has been politics of definition which is taking the centerstage whenever desertification is discussed at any forum. In the recent past, the UNCOD (United Nations Conference On Desertification) in 1977 defined the concept of desertification as "Diminution or destruction of the biological potential of land, and can lead ultimately to desert like conditions. It is an aspect of the widespread deterioration of ecosystem and has diminished or destroyed the biological potential, i.e. plant and animal production for multiple use purposes at a time when increased productivity is needed to support growing population in quest of development."⁴

The Ad-Hoc consultative meeting on the assessment of desertification, which was convened by UNEP in Nairobi in February 1990, adopted the following definition of desertification; "Desertification/land degradation, in the context of assessment, is land degradation in Arid, Semi-arid and Dry Sub-humid Areas resulting from adverse impact." On Land and the process of degradation the report continues, "Land in this concept includes soil and local water resources, land surface and vegetation and crops. Degradation implies reduction of resources potential by one of a combination of processes acting on the land. These processes include water erosion, wind erosion and sedimentation by those agents, long term reduction in the amount or diversity of natural vegetation, where relevant, and salinization and sodification." This definition was used by UNEP for the

³ . Article 1 in the *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification Particularly In Africa: Text with Annexes*, UNEP information unit for conventions, Geneva, 1994. P. 3.

⁴ *World Map of Desertification*, United Nations Conference on Desertification, UNEP, Nairobi, 1977. P. 5.

quantitative assessment of the status of desertification, which was conducted during 1990-1991. The exact wording of the definition of desertification is less important than an agreement on a more operationally suitable tool for assessing and combating the problem. This definition sets desertification within the broad framework of global land degradation.⁵ From the Rio summit in 1992 to 1996 when UNCCD came in force there were debates on the definitions of desertification too.

Our planet is called Earth and all lives on earth depend on soil. The soil formation is a lengthy process but the Earth and its soil are now rapidly vanishing. The Worldwatch Institute estimated that the Continents loose 24 billion tonnes of topsoil every year. The problem is grave in drylands which is more than 1/3rd of the Earth's total land surface. In drylands, soil is fragile and vegetation is less and here desertification occurs very rapidly. The process of desertification affects the entire 73 percent of the total drylands. Some 70 percent of the 5.2 billion hectares of drylands used for agriculture around the world are already degraded.

Desertification is a dynamic process not necessarily exclusive to any region. Its concomitant processes like soil erosion, salinization, waterlogging occur at different pace in different parts of the globe. The areas which are threatened due to desertification include 27 million hectares of irrigated farmland, 175 million hectares of rainfed cropland and a little over 3 billion hectares of rangeland.⁶ Desertification is a disaster more devastating for populations living in the most deprived areas of the world. They have not only lost their livelihood but also the economic and social institutions. The productive members had to migrate affecting the harmony of the society.

Desertification is a natural and socio-economic process which reduces the fertility and biological productivity of the soil to the level which is similar to the deserts. Though desertification affects mainly arid and semiarid areas, it is also found elsewhere. It is the result of long historical process by which natural

⁵ *Status Of Desertification And Implementation Of UN Plan Of Action To Combat Desertification*, A report of the Executive Director, UNEP Governing Council, III special session, Nairobi, 3-5 Feb 1992, p. 1

⁶ *The Encroaching Deserts: The Consequence of Human Failure*, A report for the Independent Commission on Humanitarian Issues, Popular Prakashan, Bombay. 1990. Pp. 19-20.

phenomenon and human activities reinforce each other in changing the characteristics of natural environment. The history of mankind shows that large communities live in the semi-arid and arid areas and have developed their institutional mechanisms and socio-economic patterns according to the constraints and potentialities of surrounding natural systems. Arid lands and deserts are expressions used as synonymous to designate certain areas and drought is seen as its inseparable element. Arid areas are not bound to culminate into deserts because desertification is only a symptom, the most dramatic symptom of the lack of development of particular part of the world. Arid lands are areas with a dry climate. According to experts, arid land covers 35 percent of land surface. The deserts, in turn, are quite different from desertification; deserts are the places which receive annual rainfall less than 4 percent of the average rainfall. Desertification is a process in which drylands get converted into deserts because of various reasons.

As there were difference of opinion over the definition of desertification, the debate also followed on the causes of desertification. It has four primary anthropogenic causes; overcultivation, overgrazing, deforestation and poor irrigation practices. These are affected by factors such as changes in population and environment together with changes in social and economic conditions of the people.⁷ Population growth is considered as one of the most crucial reasons for desertification. Northern and southern countries were totally divided on this issue during the negotiations in the UNCCD. North says that population is the main reason because most severely affected areas are also most populated and located in south. South objected to this line of reasoning and argued that desertification is more or less related to trade practices of North. This is one of the crucial debates due to which there was much delay in the adoption of the Convention. Over the past few centuries, the rate of increase in arable area has slowed down, although population growth has not. For instance, the relative increase in arable land was 103 percent from 1700 to 1850, and only 28 percent from 1950 to 1980. However, population growth continued unabated. Against the nine-fold surge in population from 1700 (0.7 billion) to 1999 (6 billion), the per capita cropland availability has

⁷ Alan Grainger, *Desertification*, Earthscan, London, 1982

fallen from 0.39 ha to 0.22 ha. Opportunities for adding new cropland area are shrinking fast, so the rate of cropland expansion is expected to fall further in the future. The present growth rate of arable land (0.2 %) is only one-seventh the growth rate in population. The decline in per capita cropland availability will be particularly sharp in the developing countries, where 94 percent of the future population growth (74 out of 78 million each year) will occur.⁸ In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, land holding per capita of 1.6 ha in 1990 will drop to 0.63 ha in 2025.⁹ After much acrimony, countries agreed on the causes but tension between developed and developing countries remained as usual.

Desertification is not a direct phenomenon. Factors like misuse of land, water and industrialisation cause the depletion of natural resources which reflects in the form of drought and land degradation. According to one point of view, unsustainable agriculture practices due to intensive cultivation of crops for exporting may cause desertification. Yet another section of people opposed this point of view and this lack of consensus among the experts was one of the reasons responsible for desertification to remain on the margins but never considered a serious global problem. It was regarded as local problems of Africa and Asia. It was because of hard lobbying of African countries it was recognised as a global problem. The affected countries were poor so their voice was ignored in the 1970s and 1980s but after dangerous drought in Sahel region, people realised the problem of desertification more clearly.

Desertification is also considered as a threat to International security. UNCCD had confirmed this.¹⁰ For the first time recognition that such a problem exists was articulated by various experts including the ones from NATO in a workshop held in Valencia, Spain in December 2003. This workshop acknowledged the concerns of UNCCD and emphasised that desertification threatens not only food security, environmental security and livelihood security but also puts tremendous pressure on social, economic, political and demographic

⁸ Jagdish C Katyal & Paul L G Vick, *Desertification: Concept, Causes and Amelioration*, ZEF discussion papers on development policy, No. 33, Centre for Development Research, University of Bonn, Oct. 2000. p. 20.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ www.unccd.int/publicinfo/presser/showpresser

securities. According to United Nations figures, there were 135 million people who were displaced as a consequence of desertification. Some 10 million people eventually will move from the decertified areas in sub-Saharan Africa towards northern areas in next 20 years. Every year 70,000 to 80,000 Mexicans leave their country and enter America to find work. A large number of people have lost their lives in China to expanding deserts, sand drifts, dune movement and sandstorms in decades.¹¹ In Haiti, as a result of land degradation, the per capita grain production come to half what it was 40 years ago; 1.3 million Haitians have fled their country in the last two decades.

Although the losses due to desertification were heavy for each continent, these countries were not keen to adopt any convention to combat the problem. According to the estimate, out of the 110 countries affected by desertification, 20 are either non-industrialised or oil producing and are developing countries whose problems can not be solved “without major external assistance through international partnership.”¹²

There was another very different kind of debate which is related to the deserts and desertification. It was the concept of “advancing deserts”. On 14th March 1986, the then US President George Bush urged the Senate to extend aid to Sudan because “desertification was advancing nine kilometre per annum”.¹³ On 11th September 1986, in a debate in the European parliament on the subject of aid to Africa, Winifred Ewing, the Scottish MEP declared that aid must go to Sahel region because the deserts were advancing at eight kilometres per year.¹⁴ Whether or not, the theory of “advancing deserts” is true, various people opposed it. Hellden stressed that deserts do not advance. The deserts may appear to advance when a lack of rainfall occurs over a considerable period of time leading to extremely dry conditions in marginal lands which often gets reversed with good rainfall.¹⁵ In the same year, one UNEP study team observed that deserts comprise

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² A new assessment of the world status of desertification, *Desertification Control Bulletin*, No. 20, UNEP, 1991.

¹³ Andrew Warren and Clive Agnew, *An Assessment Of Desertification And Land Degradation In Arid, Semi Arid Areas*, UNEP, 1988.

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ U Hellden, “Desertification: Time for An Assessment”, *Ambio*, Vol. 20, no. 8, 1991.

a process that can be described as contraction and expansion, which is very different to desertification. Desertification occurs in dryland areas whereas cyclic oscillations in vegetative production occur in desert fringes explained as expansion and contraction of deserts.

Deserts are vast areas with extreme conditions which do not encourage survival of human population. However, they come as a bane as well as a boon for some countries and hence, these countries play the politics of deserts. Deserts also form natural boundaries between various countries. Several wars have been fought in these deserts between countries such as, India and Pakistan, Iraq and Kuwait and others. In Middle East, the famous wars of medieval times took place only in these vast stretches of deserts. The eight-year long war between Iran and Iraq was waged in the deserts as they share desert boundary. Not only deserts, but the process of desertification is also related to war. Many experts believe that there is a direct link between desertification, poverty and war. As population grow, small farmers in poor countries lack the means to increase the means of production without further degrading the drylands. This is made worse by the increasing need to cultivate cash crops to earn foreign currency.

A particularly complex and serious problem seems to persist in the Sudan-Sahelian region of Africa. Although there are no directly measured data on desertification and its social and economic consequences for the region as a whole, certain case studies and published statistical data for some of the countries of the region indicate that the situation is getting worse, rather than improving. In the Sahel, for example, within the last 20 years from 1969 to 1989, agricultural production has fluctuated from year to year in conformity with rainfall patterns. However, the general trend within this period was positive and some growth of agricultural production was obtained. This trend of growth was mainly due to the expansion of the cropping area, while the average yields were stagnating at a low level, despite all technological and management efforts, clearly indicating the effect of continuing land degradation.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Status Of Desertification And Implementation Of UN Plan Of Action To Combat Desertification*, A report of the Executive Director, UNEP Governing Council, III special session, Nairobi, 3-5 Feb 1992, Pp. 14-15.

Desertification has a considerable bearing on overall economic performance and prospect in the majority of African countries affected by the process, as these countries rely heavily on their drylands as their main resource base. Agricultural per capita production, the indicator that reflects the ability of the domestic agricultural sector to satisfy domestic consumer demand, is stagnating or has even declined from the level of the 1970s. Similarly, the average annual growth of per capita GNP in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased at 3.0 percent between 1965 and 1973, only to fall by 2.8 percent between 1980 and 1986, by 4.4 percent in 1987 and by 0.5 percent in 1989. Furthermore, economic growth in Africa was lower in 1990 than in 1989, particularly in countries of the Sudan-Sahelian region. In Sudan-Sahel region of Africa which embraces the dry zones of both west and east Africa contains some of the most poorest countries in the world; Mali, Burkinafaso, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. Each had a per capita GNP less than \$ 400 in 1996. Most of these countries are severely affected by internal strife. Faced with political instability caused by struggle over dwindling resources resulting from land degradation, government often responds with military methods to suppress the violence. So the governments get involved in violent methods due to problems exacerbated by the process of desertification.

In one way the problem is severely linked to the political economy of these countries. This issue will be dealt in detail in 2nd and 3rd chapter. I will try to explain the possible linkages between desertification, trade, poverty and war in these countries. Civil strife is complicating factor which adversely affect the resource system and availability of food in many drylands of Africa. The problem in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Chad, Angola, Mozambique and other countries of Africa are well known. Although short term in itself, civil strife contributes greatly to the long-term process of land degradation in many ways, partly because land is unattended which, contrary to general belief, is not always good for the natural recovery of land.

Another remarkable instance is found in countries where deserts and desertification occur but there is no urgency to fight this problem. In these countries deserts play to their advantage. This is an interesting and unique aspect

which played an important role in determining the role of some of the countries during the negotiations in the UNCCD. These are the deserts found in American continent and Middle East. China has a very vast desert area and India has a long stretch of desert in Thar but these countries use these deserts to their advantage. They use the deserts as the natural and most efficient boundary with their neighbours so it is strategic asset in one sense.¹⁷ Adding to the strategic nature of these stretches is the fact that all the oil wells, especially in the Middle East, are found in the desert. The oil is the most important energy resource in the world today and deserts are a providential gift to Middle Eastern countries. Their affluent lifestyles, wealth and political importance exist only due to oil (and hence the deserts) and this is the reason these countries do not consider desertification as a problem to contend with. It becomes ostensibly apparent with Middle Eastern countries taking a negotiating position that is, at once, variance with the stand of those African countries badly hit by this process. Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, etc. resorted to obscurantist tactics aimed at delaying the agreement in the Convention.

On the other hand, there are countries like India and China which are developing, have no oil wells in desert but desert provided them with other geographical benefits. For India, Thar provides a natural boundary with its archrival Pakistan. India exploded its nuclear bombs in these long and desolate stretches of Thar Desert. China dumps its nuclear wastes in the desert of Takla Makan. Although deserts prove beneficial to India and China, they supported Africa on the UNCCD because land degradation itself is a big problem for them but opposed the European-US proposal of special status to Africa in UNCCD.

Deserts have been metaphors of death also. Its virtues can be compared with oceans and mountains but the abundance of deserts can be dangerous to mankind. Although we know that it helps in many ways to the human race, human societies, all through the ages, have actively assumed deserts as an avoidable thing. With the growing area of drylands, desertification is becoming greater problem day by day. Since the convention agreed upon to combat desertification

¹⁷ Geoffery Kemp & Robert E. Harkavy, *Strategic Geography and the Changing Middle East*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 1997, Pp. 157-160.

in 1994, nothing substantial has come fore. There are various reasons for such neglect. During the negotiation for convention, it was quite clear that nations either do not realise the dangerous consequences of desertification or they are trying to avoid it by only closing their eyes. Despite the fact that more than 191 nations signed the convention, problem still persists because effective steps have not been taken to implement the goals prescribed by the convention. The convention can not be seen in isolation. It should be entertained with other conventions on water, wetlands, climate change, and biodiversity because this is a problem, which is an aggregate result of all the above-mentioned challenges. Without a wholesome and comprehensive approach mankind can not stop this problem.

In last chapter, I have tried to analyse the Convention. This leads to the analysis of the progress made in last 10 years and challenges ahead before the convention. I have put my efforts to show the links between this convention and other conventions so that there could be a wholesome approach to better understand the entire gambit of environmental problems. In second chapter, I have discussed the circumstances that have given rise to the UNCCD in 1994 and also the efforts taken before and after Rio. The INCD meetings and issues discussed in those meetings will be dealt in detail to comprehend the stands of different countries. I will try to show the linkage between trade, poverty and desertification, which is still is a vague assumption. There are no scientific evidences for the extent of damage done to the environment but socio-economic impact surely exists which usually gets translated into various strifes on the ground.

Recent developments have further underlined the fact that desertification results from complex interactions among physical, chemical, biological, socio-economic and political factors which are local, national and global in nature. The linkage between challenges to productivity and thus the physical, chemical, and biological stability of the land and national and international economic policies was often overlooked. Trade barriers have been particularly disadvantageous for developing countries affected by or prone to desertification during the past decades. And while the burden on farmers and pastoralisation in these countries can be traced partly to international policies and markets, it has also roots in local

land tenure practices as well as domestic priorities that often favour the urban consumers over rural producer. Frequently, too, development policies have not been geared towards reducing poverty so that marginalized people received little support in breaking the vicious circle that forced them to mismanage land. "Rural women in particular were often unable to obtain credit and access to advisory services that could help them improve their land use practices."¹⁸

¹⁸ *Status Of Desertification And Implementation Of UN Plan Of Action To Combat Deserts*, A report of the Executive Director, UNEP Governing Council, III special session, Nairobi, 3-5 Feb. 1992, p. 12.

CHAPTER II

MULTILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION: GENESIS OF UNCCD

The first international effort to combat desertification began at the end of the great Sahelian drought and famine of 1968-1974 in which over 200,000 people and millions of their animals died. The United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office was set up in 1973 to assist nine drought-prone countries in West Africa. However, later on its activities had expanded across the continent. Assistance was subsequently expanded to cover 22 countries south of the Sahara and north of the Equator. At the same time sub-regional organisations were established in Africa. Similarly, since 1985 through Special Programme for Sub-Saharan Countries Affected by Drought and Desertification, the International Fund for Agricultural Development has mobilised some \$ 400 million and combined with another \$350 million contributed through co-financing, it has helped to pay for 45 projects in 25 countries.

For a start neither the governments of the affected countries, nor international aid donors gave it sufficient priority. In 1980 it was estimated that \$ 4.5 billion would have to be spent each year if the Plan of Action was to be properly implemented: \$2.4 billion of this was needed in countries that would have largely to rely on foreign aid. Yet only a quarter of the required aid, \$ 0.6 billion, was actually being provided. Meanwhile only 20 governments less than a quarter of those whose countries were affected, had developed national plans to combat desertification by 1991-14 years after the Plan of Action had been agreed.

When governments and donors initiated action, the effort was often marred through lack of co-ordination. Aid-giving countries and agencies frequently insisted the precondition that recipient countries should draw up new plans as a framework for their assistance – with little relation to similar plans that had already been produced at the behest of other donors and then all too often did not see them to completion. Even more important, the social dimension of desertification was given too little attention, and the people actually affected by it

became alienated as they were insufficiently consulted. The problem continued to get worse.

Desertification and the UN

The UN first addressed the issue on a global scale at the United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) held in Nairobi, Kenya from 29 August - 9 September in 1977, which put the issue on the international agenda as a worldwide economic, social and environmental problem.¹ It produced the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD) – a series of 28 specific guidelines and recommendations meant to assist countries in developing action plans and to coordinate assistance from the international community. The PACD was approved by the UN General Assembly at its 27th session on December 19, 1977. In principle the Plan of Action left little to be desired - experts found that its principles were still valid – but in practice, its implementation fell far short of expectations.

The recognition within the UN of desertification as a global problem began with a series of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) during 1974, culminating in resolution 24/337, which decided to convene a United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) in 1977. Some 95 countries, 50 UN offices and 65 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) participated in the Conference.

The most important result of the UNCOD in Nairobi was the adoption of the PACD. This was designed to ‘prevent and to arrest the advance of desertification, and, where possible, to reclaim desertified land for productive use. The PACD envisaged both transnational projects (for example a ‘transnational green belt in North Africa’) and action by national governments. It was not a success. A major reason for this was that the investment in the form of aid from donor nations did not materialise. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) estimated in 1980 that about \$900 billion would be required to finance a programme to meet the demands of the core of the PACD over twenty years: \$4.5

¹ <www.unccd.de/publicinfo/showbackground.php?number=1>

billion per year. This would have rehabilitated all desertified irrigated land, 70 per cent of rain-fed cropland and 50 per cent of rangelands. The UN General Assembly did establish a 'special account' for anti-desertification project finance, despite opposition from certain donor nations. However, the UN 'special account' attracted only \$ 48,500 in its first six years. UNEP itself spent \$20 million on desertification between 1974 and 1983, but overall only \$7 billion was spent between 1978 and 1983 (\$1.17 million per year or 0.2 per cent of that needed). Furthermore, of that \$7 billion, only about \$400,000 was actually spent directly on projects aimed at 'desertification control', the rest going on infrastructural projects such as roads.

The implementation of PACD was left to governments with an overall coordinating role assigned to UNEP. As a result of UNCOD, two groups were formed: 1) the Interact Working Group on Desertification, which is responsible for giving guidance to UNEP in overall implementation of the plan; and 2) the Consultative Group for Desertification Control (DESCON) that assists in mobilizing resources for combating desertification.²

Several projects were implemented under PACD, particularly in the Sahel region of Africa. Most were unsuccessful because of their expensive, top-down and large-project approach. Critics say the projects failed because they did not respond to the local socioeconomic conditions, and accorded too much importance to technologies without ensuring the participation of local people.³ PACD was also low on resources and funding, since the North refused to support the official outcome of UNCOD and commit funds to fight desertification.⁴

The focus shifted back to desertification in 1983-84, when disaster struck again in Africa in the form of yet another drought. Combined with outbreaks of political strife and civil war, it resulted in large-scale starvation.

² *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol. 4, no 1, 1993. < <http://www.iisd.ca/vol04/0401018e.html> >

³ Anon, *Handbook of Desertification Control*, Investigating Committee on Comprehensive Measures for Desertification Control, Overseas Environment Cooperation Center, Japan, December 1996, p 8.

⁴ Ravi Sharma, "Arid Politics", *Down To Earth*, vol.2, no.8, September 15, 1993, p 31.

In 1984, and again in 1991, UNEP conducted a worldwide survey on the status of world desertification, to evaluate the implementation of PACD. The survey concluded that there was paucity of basic information about desertification; national and international agencies gave a low priority to desertification control; and, necessary financial support was not available. Moreover, desertification control programmes were not adequately integrated with development projects. Affected populations were not fully involved in planning and implementation of the programmes. Though desertification is caused by socioeconomic and socio-economic political factors, often only technological measures were used to solve the problem.⁵ The lack of a global desertification monitoring system also limited the planning and implementation of an effective desertification control programme.

The international efforts to combat desertification and the implementation of the PACD have been less than expected. According to UNEP, in the 1992 report of the Executive Director, 'Status of Desertification and Implementation of UN sponsored PACD'; several global conferences and studies identified the following reasons for the failure of the Plan⁶: 1) low priority by funding agencies; 2) lack of funds by developing countries to cope with the problem; 3) lack of integration of desertification control programmes into other socio-developmental programme; 4) failure to include local populations in the solutions; and 5) technical were sought for socio-political and socio-economic problems.

Developing nations, led by African countries, insisted that proper attention should be given to desertification during the preparations for the 1992 Earth Summit. Eventually, after tough bargaining the world's leaders agreed in Agenda 21 to call on the UN General Assembly to set up an Inter-governmental Negotiating Committee on Desertification (INCD) to prepare a legally binding instrument by June 1994.

⁵ Op.cite., *Handbook on Desertification Control*, 1996, p 20.

⁶ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol. 4, no 1, 1993. <<http://www.iisd.ca/vol04/0401018e.html>>

Even before the adoption of UN General Assembly resolution 44/228 that created the UNCED, desertification was given high priority. In resolution 44/172, adopted three days before the UNCED resolution, the General Assembly invited UNCED to “accord high priority to desertification control and consider all means necessary, including financial, scientific and technological resources, to halt and reverse the process of desertification with a view to preserving the ecological balance of the planet,” and invited UNEP to provide a report on the progress of the implementation of the PACD.⁷

Nevertheless, desertification was given little attention during the first three sessions of the UNCED Preparatory Committee (PrepCom). At PrepCom I, decision 1/15 (Soil Loss, Desertification and Drought) invited UNEP to report on the implementation of the PACD. It requested the UNCED Secretariat to consult with the specialized agencies dealing with the implementation of the PACD and report on the results achieved, the control measures applied and the need for further international cooperation to combat desertification and drought. They also requested that the Secretariat prepare a study on the ways and means of expanding reforestation activities to combat land degradation and desertification.

At PrepCom II, the UNCED Secretariat presented a document on the protection and management of land resources. The governments requested the Secretariat to elaborate on these proposals at PrepCom III. At PrepCom III the Secretariat presented a report of the secretary-general of UNCED on Combating Desertification and Drought, which contains a review of the issues, a report on the current status of UN agencies on desertification and a discussion of progress made in the implementing of measures to control desertification. Annexes to this document included a UNEP progress report, a review of drought monitoring and research activities and report on reforestation activities to combat land degradation and desertification, and alternative and sustainable systems of production and livelihoods in marginal lands.⁸

⁷ That report was represented to the UNEP Governing Council in February 1992 (UNEP/GCSS. III/3).

⁸ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol. 4, no 1, 1993. <<http://www.iisd.ca/vol04/0401018e.html>>

Working Group I did not address desertification until the third week of the session and discussion was cut short due to lack of time and unavailability of documents in all working languages. There were criticisms, especially on the part of the developing countries, of the proposed programme areas for Agenda 21. During discussion, the governments requested the Secretariat to present a revised set of proposals for PrepCom IV and, at the insistence of the top of its agenda for PrepCom IV.

In November 1991 more than 40 ministers from African states met in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire for a regional preparatory meeting for UNCED. Unanimously they adopted the African Common Position on Environment and Development accompanied by the Abidjan Declaration. Among other things, this document called for convention to combat desertification as one of the concrete outcomes to be included in Agenda 21.

The draft of what was to become Chapter 12 of Agenda 21 was tabled at PrepCom IV as the first substantive item of business for Working Group I. The African Group presented a series of amendments including a new programme area, 'Encourage and Promote Popular Participation and Environmental Education Focussing on Desertification Control.' To this documents and the revised text became the basis for negotiation. By the end of the session, the PrepCom had adopted almost the entire Agenda 21 chapter on combating desertification. However, they were unable to reach consensus on two paragraphs that dealt with a future binding convention on desertification.

Desertification underwent an institutional renaissance in the run-up to the UNCED in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In a manner reminiscent of the dissatisfaction of non-industrialised countries at Stockholm in 1972, Southern countries resented the sidelining of the environmental problems relevant to them, and desertification came to embody their dissatisfaction. Southern Africa was also in the grip of severe drought. As a result, the issue was discussed at length in the final Prep Com meeting before the Rio Conference, and a chapter on desertification was

included in Agenda 21⁹. A formal commitment was made at Rio to negotiate and agree a Convention on Desertification by 1994, although this did not go through without opposition. Arguments included the question of whether desertification was actually a global issue, and the question of whether Southern demands for a desertification convention would be traded off against the desire from the USA and the EU for a forest convention.¹⁰

Following Rio, an INCD was established rapidly, meeting in Geneva in 1993. It worked through a series of issues, including scientific uncertainty about the definition of desertification, and the extent to which it was a global problem. After grueling five sessions, a text of the Convention with four regional annexes (on Africa, Asia, Latin America and the northern Mediterranean respectively) was complete for signature by the deadline in June 1994 (although the INCD continued to meet to clarify the meaning and implication of certain articles). The final convention is an interesting reflection of both the politics of the Rio Process and several decades of confused thinking about environmental degradation and development.

The Convention came into force in December 1996, the first Conference of the Parties (CoP-1) held in Rome in 1997. A permanent secretariat was established in Bonn, Germany, and (unusually), the conference included a plenary meeting for dialogue with NGOs. By 1997 the convention had been ratified by 113 countries (twice as many as the other two Rio conventions, on Biological Diversity and Climate Change), although several key countries had yet to ratify it, notably Japan, Russia and the US.

The Convention to Combat Desertification was proposed by Southern countries primarily as a way to focus financial resources on real problems of some of the world's poorest people. As with the PACD, lack of funds is a key constraint in implementation. A 'global mechanism' (administered by IFAD, the International Fund for Agricultural Development) was agreed to mobilise and channel funds (a mechanism similar to that of the Framework Convention on

⁹ <http://sedac.ciesin.org/pidb/texts/a21-12-desertification-and-drought.html>

¹⁰ Desertification: Myth or Reality?- <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/xpress/dex9407.htm>

Climate Change), but the flow has been slight. It is not clear whether, in the long run, Africa will be able to persuade other regions to let it be a 'special case' deserving privileged attention, and whether the broad focus of the convention (embracing environmental management, poverty democratisation and governance) will prove workable, or will actually have any impact on the lives of the poor in arid areas.

European Union's Responsibility

Meanwhile, some aid donors have geared up to support the convention, notably perhaps the EU, which is recognized as having desertification within its own region, in the Mediterranean. Between 1990 and 1995-6 some 524 million EU was dedicated to desertification projects in developing countries through the European Development Fund, cooperation agreement with Asian and Latin American countries, and thematic budget lines. These supported 237 projects relating to desertification. The EC has had a particular commitment to Africa since the 1970s. It launched the 'EC action plan for Africa concerning the protection of natural resources for combating desertification' in 1986, and spent 280 million EU currency (ECU) between 1990 and 1996 in twenty six countries of sub-Saharan Africa, 51 per cent of which went to West Africa. From 1990 the EC agreed to spend 23.2 million ECU over eight years on a project to rehabilitate common lands in the Aravali Hills, Haryana, India. The project sought to restore vegetation over 33,000 ha of village-owned hill land, conserving soil fertility, reducing soil erosion, 're-establishing natural hydrological balance', and enabling villagers to meet needs for fuelwood, fodder and timber. The projects ranged from tree and grass-planting contour-trenching and wall-building through to work on land management institutions (to encourage effective community control to these lands and the involvement of women in land management decisions) and the introduction of new technologies such as fuel-efficient stoves, grass-harvesting and silage-making.

Since the 1970s, anti-desertification projects have become increasingly multi-disciplinary and diverse, reflecting the growing perception that the problem of 'desertification' is not simple, and certainly not conducive to narrow technical solutions. Poverty, economy and social organization are an integral part of the challenge facing development planners and those they seek to help. Concern about

desertification, which may have started by addressing 'the inexorable advances of the desert', has ended up addressing questions of poverty and sustainable livelihood at household scale. It is quite proper these issues of environmental degradation should be central; to thinking and policy in sustainable development, for the development process is both a response to and too often the cause of, harsh and degraded environments endured by the poor.

It is noted that experts and planners have a very mixed track record in their attempts to define and identify environmental degradation, and often a frankly poor record in trying to overcome it. The poor experience degradation not as an aggregate phenomenon of ecological change, but directly, in the form of challenges to welfare and livelihood sustainability.

Africa –Asia Splits: south-south division

Although there is a widespread acceptance of the broader orientation of the new convention, and its stress on local involvement, negotiators have faced three major disputes: North-South disagreements on the role of economic issues and of aid funds, and a disagreement about Africa's priority status in the convention.

The impetus behind the agreement at the Earth Summit to have a convention was the dissatisfaction expressed by African countries at the way in which desertification had been treated in the run up to the conference. This led to a formal commitment in Rio to agree a convention by June 1994. It was acknowledged that it would pay particular attention to African countries, through a special protocol to be appended to the convention.

But at the first session of the negotiations, Asians and Latin American countries objected, and demanded to be treated equally. Some observers believe that Asian and Latin American nations have been acting on the supposition that the convention will bring in additional money for countries affected by desertification. There was talk of a split between the Africans and the Asian/Latin America group and a money-induced break-up of the G77 solidarity, which secured agreement for the convention in the first place.

At the first meeting of the INCD in Nairobi in May 1993, African countries' insistence on being made the major beneficiaries of the anti-desertification funds that will follow the convention met with vigorous rebuttal from the Asian and Latin American countries, whose position was reinforced with the release of UNEP figures which show that the total land affected by desertification in Asia is marginally higher than in Africa.

But speaking for the African group, Moulaye Diallo, head of the Malian delegation, told NGOs at the Nairobi Session that it was mainly "the Asia and Latin American countries that benefited financially from the earlier agreements. Therefore the desertification convention should be Africa-centered to compensate for the sharply dwindling aid to the continent."

African countries, NGOs and many experts argue that there are good reasons why donor countries should not allow their own problems and "donor fatigue" to prevent them from giving Africa increased aid to combat desertification, drought and land degradation. The arguments include:

- The distinctive characteristics of Africa's dryland regions, in terms of the people and cultures who have made their home in these regions over many generations, and the vegetation and wildlife they support.
- The vulnerability of African dryland peoples to food shortage and famine. Despite the variability of climate faced by people living in these areas, a substantial population depends on such resources. Dryland can continue to support people if treated correctly, but this requires a rethinking of how development takes place, with greater involvement of local people in the definition and design of projects, and a marriage of internal and external skills.
- The Political consequences of continued improvement among Africa's poorest countries and their sense of having been abandoned by donors.
- Continued improvement will provide even greater pressures for migration within Africa from poorer to richer countries, and from Africa to richer regions to the world. Acceptance and integration of larger numbers of migrant

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populations impose major costs on all societies, and render from potentially fewer stables.

Delaying Strategy to Establish the Convention

Negotiators finally agreed to attach regional protocols covering other parts of the world. But the split and the decision to extend the protocols have caused delay, and there is a fear that it may become impossible to meet the June 1994 deadline.

There seems to be the political will to come up with a convention that is workable by June 1994. So the compromise may be to finalise the convention and the African protocol by June. The remaining regional protocols, the experts believe, could be ready for signing in the early part of 1995.

Camilla Toulmin believes that the convention itself may turn to be “so good that the insistence on additional protocols may fade away”. However, such optimism is not universal. *New Scientists* magazine (9 October 1993) suggested that “political wrangling” may delay the signing of the convention by a year.

Money will be the focus of the most conflict in the continuing negotiations for a convention. Donor countries are worried that the new convention would be seen as justification for additional demands for anti-desertification money at a time when they are cutting back domestic public spending.

And African countries do expect substantial sums of money from bilateral and multilateral donors for anti-desertification efforts. But this expectation is unrealistic, given the current mood of public opinion in the North and the state of the industrialised economies. Donor countries have been stressing the need for quality rather than quantity. And it is very likely that any funds committed under that has become the norm under various structural adjustment programmes.

Poverty and Economics Issues

The negotiations – and the convention itself – offer an opportunity to look again at the problems of some of the poorest countries in the world. It has been

acknowledged that UNCOD's perspective was too narrow, and that the desertification convention must include analysis of the socio-economic factors involved in desertification. But there are sharp differences between North and South as to how far this can go.

There is a clear division between developed and developing nations on the relevance of socio-economic matters in the convention. Third World countries, supported by NGOs, want to include in the convention issues such as trade, debt, and the causes of poverty and relations between North and South. African environment and development NGOs issued a statement asserting that 'international trade patterns, external debt, colonial and post-independence policies, among other factors, have disrupted African political, social and economic systems. They have changed the context of African agriculture. They have contributed to the current problems of land degradation.'

Industrialised countries oppose the inclusion of general statements on poverty alleviation. An example of this split emerged at the Geneva meeting of the INCD in September 1993. Belgium, on behalf of the European Community, told the conference that the EC favoured anti-desertification plans specific to desertification and subject to monitoring. Guinea Bissau, Burundi, Kenya, Peru and Malawi responded that matters relating to poverty couldn't be left out. Morocco said that poverty alleviation and population stabilization should be key elements.¹¹

The split reflects a broader division in the political and ideological conceptions of international problems. The developing countries say that overall appreciation of every issue must include the problems caused by the imbalances in international relations, particularly trade. The industrialised nations naturally reject such a formulation and will prefer to deal with problems on their own "merit" – that is, the isolation and out of context. But is obvious, not least from the deficiencies of the 1977 Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, that the

¹¹ *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, 20 September 2003. , <<http://www.iisd.ca/>>

goals of the convention can only be achieved if its perceptions are based on more than a narrow view of desertification.

It is likely that the preamble or a statement of principles will incorporate some of these general concerns, while paying particular attention to other demands such as research into and the use of indigenous technologies.

Trade and Desertification

With the Convention negotiations going on at the same time as the talks on a new General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), it was apparent that there was some overlap. Industrialised countries do not want to broaden the convention to include trade, which they argue is covered by GATT. But there are many examples to show why trade is a seemingly non-environmental issue, which belongs in a desertification convention. For example, farmers in Thailand switched from rice to tapioca in response to the demand of European cattle breeders for a cheap alternative to grain for feed. A major consequence of this was extensive deforestation and land degradation in Thailand. Now, Europe is producing a surplus of grain and wants to reduce its tapioca imports – leaving Thailand with degraded land and a cut in the tapioca trade, which employs five million.¹²

Debt and Desertification

Southern governments promote export-oriented cash crop production to counter debt burdens, and sometimes introduce laws that trigger land degradation. Caught in a vicious cycle of debt, trade and desertification, developing country governments often knowingly introduce national laws that lead to desertification. The governments of Chad and Senegal, for instance, have enacted laws to ensure that farmers grow export-oriented cash crops on whatever land is available. In Senegal, a law takes away the ownership of land from any farmer who does not plough within a three-year period. In Tunisia, a law actually grants ownership to

¹² *Down To Earth*, 15 September 1993.

farmers who plough communal grazing land. These, and other incentives, result in an intensive cash crop-based cropping pattern.

Cash crop production significantly increased in the region of Sahel during the 1968-74 period of severe drought, while food production slumped. During 1962-72, for example, peanut production in Mali increased by 70 per cent and cotton production by 400 per cent.¹³ The increased demand for cash crops discouraged food crop production, and virtually wiped out practices such as allowing the land to lie fallow and recover, or crop rotation systems, which kept the land in good condition. In the late 1970s, 75 percent of Senegal's export earnings came from peanuts and 80 percent of Chad's from cotton. Governments and large farmers in West Africa have become critically dependent on cash crops to pay for imports and taxes. In the bargain, the intense cultivation of the lands through monoculture has led to increasing desertification.

Thailand and tapioca: The case of tapioca from Thailand, where it is grown on a large-scale, shows that in a market-driven system only the cheapest producers survive. Any attempt to invest in measures to protect the environment increases prices, and the producers are not able to compete in the world market.

Farmers in Isan, Thailand had grown rice till the 1960s. But once increasing grain prices forced cattle breeders in Europe to look for an alternative cattle feed such as tapioca. Thailand switched to growing tapioca and was producing 85 per cent of the world's produce in less than a decade. The European Union (EU) then decided to reduce its tapioca imports and use its stock of surplus food grains as feed instead. Moreover, during the GATT deliberations, the EU negotiated a reduction on tariffs on imports of grain in exchange for more restrictions on the import of grain substitute such as tapioca. Instead of lobbying for a fair price for tapioca so those farmers could invest in their land and arrest its degradation. European environmentalists supported the move on grounds that it

¹³ Anon, *EcoNews Africa*, vol.2, no.9, July 17, 1993, p 3.

would reduce tapioca agriculture and thus stop deforestation and land degradation in Thailand.¹⁴

As a result, since the early 1980s, tapioca imports to the EU have been subject to quantitative restrictions. Thailand, by then the world's leading exporter of tapioca, had to limit its shipments to the EU to 5.75 million tonnes (Mt.) per year in 1990-94. Various other cooperation agreements also fixed a ceiling on tapioca pellets sales to the EU from other countries such as China, Indonesia and Vietnam. To compete with the other exporters and to gain access to other markets, Thailand introduced a bonus policy to promote export to non-EU areas. The bonus rate in 1992 was established at 1.4t of the EU quota for each ton they sold to other destinations. The government on the basis of the price relation of tapioca pellets between the EU and non-EU markets decided this rate.

Indonesia, another tapioca producer, followed Thailand's example and introduced a bonus system, which resulted in a dual international price system by stimulating cheap sales of tapioca pellets to non-EU countries. Price fell to as low as US \$35 per tonne of pellets and little profit was on exports to the formerly remunerative EU market.

Any increase in the price would have resulted in Thailand being washed out of the world market. Deprived of a fair price, the farmers were unable to invest in their lands, resulting in land degradation. So Thailand lost its export earnings while its land continues to degrade.¹⁵ In a globally integrated economy, design engagement can often lead to severe land degradation.

At UNCED in Rio de Janeiro, Ambassador Tommy Koh of Singapore, Chairman of the Main Committee, took personal responsibility for holding informal consultations on the issue of a convention to combat desertification. These consultations were facilitated when the US delegation announced that it had

¹⁴ Anon, *Medium-term Prospects for Agricultural Commodities: Projections to the Year 2000*, FAO, Rome, 1994, pp. 65-66.

¹⁵ Twose Nigel, "The Developing Countries' Shortcomings", In *The Encroaching Desert: The Consequences of Human Failures*, Report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, Zed Book, London, 1986, p 59.

changed its position and could now support the idea of a convention. However, when compromise text was brought to the Main Committee, the European Community announced it could not accept a global convention arguing that desertification is a regional problem not necessarily warranting global action. Intense negotiations followed between the Africans and the Europeans as well as within the EC. Finally, the EC announced that it would accept the wording proposed by the Chair that would request the UN General Assembly to establish an inter-governmental negotiating committee to elaborate a convention to combat desertification.

Chapter 12 of Agenda 21, “Managing Fragile Eco-systems: Combating Desertification and Drought”, contains six Programme areas¹⁶: (1) Strengthening the knowledge base and developing information and monitoring systems for regions prone to desertification and drought, including the economic and social aspects of these ecosystems; (b) Combating land degradation through, inter alia, intensified soil conservation, afforestation and reforestation activities; (c) Developing and strengthening integrated development programmes for the eradication of poverty and promotion of alternative livelihood systems in area prone to desertification; (d) Developing comprehensive anti-desertification programmes and integrating them into national development plans and national environmental planing; (e) Developing comprehensive drought preparedness and drought-relief schemes, including self-help arrangements, for drought-prone areas and designing programmes to cope with environmental refugees; and (f) Encouraging and promoting popular participation and environmental education, focusing on desertification control and management of the effects of drought.

Fight for a Convention

Desertification appeared next on the international agenda during the preparatory session of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. When strong lobbying, by the Southern nations in general and African countries in particular,

¹⁶ <http://sedac.ciesin.org/pidb/texts/a21-12-desertification-and-drought.html>

resulted in an UNCCD agreement to begin negotiations for an anti-desertification convention.¹⁷

Northern nations led by the EU and the US opposed the convention at Rio because they were not willing to undertake any financial responsibility for arresting the process of desertification. Fearing that the convention would lead to the inclusion of desertification as new areas of funding under the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the US vehemently opposed the idea. Industrialised countries were opposed to a convention on desertification because they felt they were practically not affected by the desertification-poverty nexus. In their opinion, desertification is not a global problem.¹⁸

However, this stand did not deter the North from dangling the desertification convention as a carrot to induce the South to agree to a forest convention. The EU delegation openly offered to accept the desertification convention in exchange for the forest convention. Since some Southern countries, including Brazil, India, Indonesia and Malaysia, were against the forest convention (see chapter. Wood-headed proposal), while the African nations were keen to get the desertification convention, the EU threat drove a wedge between G77 nations.¹⁹

The browbeating caused an inevitable uproar, and the EU was forced to backtrack. The Africans finally got the desertification convention during the last hours of the Rio Summit after persistent lobbying. Industrialised countries gave in to the convention also to keep the African nations engaged in the Rio process, which had so far focused on climate change and bio-diversity, subjects of primary interest to the North. But because the convention was a last minute addition, no special focal area was created for it in GEF and it was a convention with no funds.

Definitional issues evoked spontaneous protests from Southern countries like India, Brazil and Malaysia. If the definition was extended to areas outside

¹⁷ Anil Agarwal et al., "Sands of Controversy", *Down To Earth*, vol.1, no.4, July 15, 1992, p 10.

¹⁸ Anil Agarwal et al (eds), *Green Politics: Global Environmental Negotiations-I*, CSE Publication, New Delhi, 1999, pp.166-8.

¹⁹ Op.cite, Anil Agarwal et al., *Down To Earth*, July 15, 1992,p10.

drylands, tropical forests too would come under the purview of the desertification convention. They contended that the term “human activities” rested the blame on the victims of desertification, and signed out issues that were essentially manifestation and not causes of the problem. Moreover, the proposed definition excluded various socioeconomic problems that caused desertification.

Though most countries participating in INCD agreed that socioeconomic problems – debt, trade, poverty, population, and commodity pricing –are related to desertification, differences cropped up between the South and North on defining the causes of desertification. While Northern countries identified population as the main cause, Southern countries deemed international trade patterns and market demands, which were controlled by the developed world, to be the culprits. They blamed the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for encouraging export-oriented growth to service debts and get more loans.

Northern countries were reluctant to discuss trade and debt in relation to desertification. They felt the objectives of the convention should not address the problems of poverty education, food and energy security, economic growth, employment and social security, and stability of financial resources. The EU and the US constantly questioned the links between desertification and trade and poverty. At the insistence of the Northern countries, two paragraphs, referring to an international economic environment for the promotion of sustainable development in affected developing countries, including debt, market conditions and pricing and trade policies, remained bracketed till INCD-4.

During INCD 1, the south pointed out that even Agenda 21 did not incorporate the reversal of traded pattern which result resources exploitation. They argued that these socioeconomic issues should be the essential objectives of the convention. One of the significant aspects of the convention lies in its addressing food security and other socioeconomic cases of desertification.

Finally, introduction to the convention text recognized the impact of trade and relevant aspects of international economic relations on the ability of affected countries to combat desertification adequately.

According to article 4 of the UNCD, the convention shall give due attention, within the international and regional bodies, to the significance to affected developing countries parties with regard to international trade, marketing arrangement and debt, with a view to establishing and enabling international economic environment conducive to the promotion of sustainable development.

Though this was an important victory for its proponents, it was not specified what concrete steps could be taken towards this end. The convention also suggests debt swaps and other innovative means, which would increase financial flow to affected developing country parties, particularly in Africa.

The issue of the socioeconomic causes of desertification became a sore point again during the discussion on research and development priorities. Southern delegates called for multi-disciplinary research that takes socio-economic aspects into account, besides the link between desertification and poverty. Northern countries, on the other hand, wanted research on the links between desertification and poverty to be carried out only as far as they are relevant. The Africans countered this by pointing out that since the convention was focused on poor people's issues, there was no need to elaborate to the relevance of the research.

Divided over Africa

The issue of granting priority to Africa remained an uneasy one throughout the INCD negotiations, and often threatened the unity of G77 itself. The original mandate by UNCED and the UN General Assembly resolution had both stated that the convention should give priority to Africa. At INCD-1, Africa nations stressed the need to draw up a convention with separate instruments for the regions affected by desertification with priority to Africa.

The INCD-I chairperson, Bo Kjellen, an experienced negotiator from Sweden, suggested the inclusion of either an annex or a protocol that would give priority to Africa, besides other region of the world experiencing serious drought or desertification. He proposed that the instrument for Africa should be negotiated first, once the main structure of the convention itself had been defined, but before other regional instruments were negotiated.

It was apparent that not all countries approved of this recommendation. Certain Latin American and Asian governments supported the need for priority treatment for Africa, yet believed that similar instruments for other regions should be negotiated simultaneously. Northern and African countries disagreed. The North said that the logistics and costs of negotiating a convention and five regional annexes within a year (since the negotiating mandate for INCD expired in June 1994) were not feasible. The Asians and South Americans (including Indian and Brazil, the latter acting as chair for G77 in the absence of Colombia) remained adamant. They insisted that the instruments for the other regions should be adopted by June 1994.

Kjellen even suggested that the 48th session of the UN General Assembly should be urged to consider extending the negotiating process, so that the convention and the African instrument are adopted by June 1994, and the other instruments come into force according to modalities to be specified in the convention. Brazil and Mexico, and later Pakistan and Peru did not accept this.²⁰

The tension within G77 spilled over to INCD-2, which was held in Geneva in September 1993. When it appeared that Brazil would again be the acting chair of G77, a number of African delegations refused to allow the group to meet. Only after Colombia took over as the chair was G77 able to meet and agree on a common position. High-level diplomacy helped build bridges between the G77 factions.

²⁰ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol.4, no. 34, 1994, <<http://www.iisd.ca/>>

It was proposed that an instrument on Africa would be negotiated once the main structure of the convention was defined. Negotiations for similar instruments for the regions were also to begin simultaneously.

The Latin American and Caribbean group, supported by the Asians, asserted that specific problems of desertification in each region should be taken into account and references to the African agreement as a blueprint for subsequent regional agreements be deleted. Several European countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Portugal, and Spain, felt since they too suffer from desertification, there should be a regional instrument covering Europe also.

The final text which was adopted by INCD-5 included the Resolution on Interim Agreement (for the period between the adoption of the convention and its entry into force, which could take at least two years), the Resolution on Urgent Action for Africa and four regional implementation annexes – one each for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Northern Mediterranean.

Problem of funding

According to UNEP that about US \$ 12 per person at risk from desertification per year is needed to combat desertification worldwide. With about one billion people at risk from desertification, this amounts to a global programme of US \$12 billion per year. An effective 20-year global effort to combat desertification would cost US \$ 10-22 billion per year. But the total expenditure on desertification control worldwide by funding countries was less than US \$ 1 billion in 1991.²¹

Funding for anti-desertification programme remained a bone of contention throughout the negotiations. At the beginning, G77 had asked for a separate global fund, monitored by a new institution. The North short down the idea, which, it felt, would entail more financial commitments from them. Portugal was the only northern country that did not oppose the G77 proposal, since it had already

²¹ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol.4, no. 22, 1994, <<http://www.iisd.ca/>>

established itself as one of the affected countries, and hoped to benefit from the fund.²²

“A global institution would have high administrative costs, which would result in few funds getting to the local level”, said the Swedish delegate at INCD-5 in Paris²³. He felt all that was needed to fund the desertification convention was ‘improved donor coordination and more effective utilisation of existing funds’ and some funds from GEF.

The deadlock over the global fund and institution continued till INCD-5, when Canada suggested establishing a coordinating mechanism instead of a separate fund or institution. Later during the same session, the US proposed that an existing organisation serve as a Global Mechanism (GM) to monitor and evaluate the activities and timely assistance. A GM came into being, with some confusion over its perceived functions. According to the final text, “GM will promote actions leading to the mobilization and channeling of substantial financial resources, including the transfer of technology”.²⁴

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and IFAD submitted a bid to host GM. While IFAD offered financial resources, UNDP offered technical expertise. The World Bank put forward a new proposal at INCD-10 (held after the Convention text was adopted) to co-host the mechanism. Southern nations were critical of all three institutions, since they offered only what the North was willing to give.²⁵ In other words, GM would mobilise funds and resources from existing sources. The North had its way when Cop-1 decided that the mechanism would have a small fund for its activities, though its primary role would be that of mobilizing and channeling resources to implement the convention.

Next came the question of where the resources the GM was expected to mobilise and channel would come from. The South felt existing funds would not be enough, and pressed for a special global fund and debt relief. It considered

²² *ibid.*

²³ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol.4, no. 55, 1994, <<http://www.iisd.ca/>>

²⁴ *Op.cite.*, Anil Agarwal et al, *Green Politics*, p 174.

²⁵ *ibid.*

GEF an inappropriate channel for desertification funds because it was dominated by the World Bank and would eventually, are ruled by the World Bank's priorities. On behalf of Africa, Mali said GEF would work only if it was improved and a new window added to fund desertification. Once again, the North rejected the proposal for a new window in GEF, fearing that it would have to pump more money into it. They felt that some anti-desertification programme could be funded through the existing windows of GEF.

The African group touched a sore point by asking for existing mechanism to be improved qualitatively and quantitatively, and for developed countries to fulfill their Rio commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of their GNP to official development assistance (ODA). In swift defence, Switzerland said the flow of funds should be determined in accordance with programmes carried out, and not measured in percentages of GNP. The US, on the other hand, said they had not endorsed the Rio ODA target in the first place, and, therefore, wanted to reference to it. The Rio commitments, Southern countries remarked, appeared to have been forgotten.²⁶

Allegations and counter-allegations continued. Northern countries accused Southern nations of not using existing funds effectively. Developed countries observed that the problem is not of the provision of funds, but the capacity of the governments and technical services to use them effectively. Canada, the EU and the US continued to insist that the bulk of resources would have to come from the affected countries.²⁷

The developed countries wanted article 6 of the Convention, which spoke of obligations of industrialised countries, to be expanded to other countries in a position to provide assistance. Latin American and Asian countries, including Brazil, China, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Venezuela opposed the move seeing it as a blatant attempt to expand the traditional donor community to include developing countries.²⁸

²⁶ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol.4, no. 22, 1994, <<http://www.iisd.ca/>>

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol.4, no. 34, 1994, <<http://www.iisd.ca/>>

The money was more important for many African countries than its source. Most French-speaking African countries, including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal supported the Norway-UK-US proposal of expanding the source of assistance.²⁹ Australia and Austria agreed, saying that since assistance includes knowledge, old categories of donors and recipients were no longer appropriate to this convention. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries had already insisted on the inclusion of an article stating that other countries are encouraged to provide, on a voluntary basis, knowledge, know-how and techniques related to desertification and/or financial resources for the implementation of the convention.

At INCD-5, the phrase *other parties in a position to give assistance* was finally deleted. It was agreed that the affected countries would allocate adequate resources in accordance with their circumstances and capabilities to combat desertification and drought. Industrialized countries, meanwhile, were to provide substantial financial resources to assist affected developing country parties, and developing countries would provide an enabling environment and formulate national action programmes (NAPS) to implement the convention.

The final text gave the North the upper hand, since most of the South's demands for additional funding were not met. The convention speaks of mobilization of adequate and substantial financial resources, with additional funds from GEF, only under the four priority issues like bio-diversity, ozone, climate change and international waters and an exploration to ways to increase finance by reducing external debt burdens of affected developing countries, particularly those in Africa. It also calls for more efficient utilisation of available funds. "Without adequate funding, the convention has a second hand status," said Daudi N. Mwakawago, Tanzania's permanent representative to UN, on behalf of G77 and China.³⁰ Other technical issues were also debated and fought before signature begins to the convention.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *Op. cite.*, Anil Agarwal et al., (eds), *Green Politics*, p 176.

Committee on Science and Technology (CST): Southern nations wanted UNCCD to have new institutions to advise CoP, including subsidiary bodies to advise on scientific and technical matters and monitoring centers. Fearing financial implications once again, Canada and many other developed countries wanted the convention to use existing institutions established under other environmental treaties such as climate change and biodiversity. Southern nations opposed the idea. They felt despite the similarity with other conventions, the nature, objectives and scope of the desertification convention were different to require independent institutions.

A compromise was finally reached, and CST was established to advise the CoP. It comprises government representatives from relevant fields of expertise. A roster of independent experts and a system of setting up ad hoc panels to serve CST were also established. Decisions on how many should serve on the panel were not governed by need but financial implications. Developing nations wanted an open-ended committee with experts from several fields, not limited to country parties. Industrialised nations suggested a small committee.

Southern countries also wanted other institutions, particularly a monitoring body and an international education and training centre or a network of regional training centres located in the South. In response, CST was asked to undertake a survey of relevant existing networks, institutions and agencies willing to become part of a network of training centers.

Review process: Northern countries wanted a simple process to review the convention's activities to reduce the financial burden on the secretariat.

Commitments to Africa: African countries wanted the secretariat to secure funds to implement the Resolution on Urgent Action for Africa, passed at INCD-5, for the period before the convention came into force. Since this would need financial contributions from the North, Japan and the EU argued that the resolution was not part of the convention and could only be funded bilaterally. This meant that no immediate action would take, and it was contrary to what had been agreed in the convention text. Some African nations had already started preparing

National Action Plans (NAPS) and expressed concern about losing credibility with local communities, which had been mobilised, and yet put on standby for lack of funds.

Some Southern countries suggested that an interim secretariat could look after the implementation of this resolution. The interim secretariat must be operational in real sense and its functions can include pursuit of urgent action for Africa; groundwork for developing countries to elaborate action plans; awareness raising, capacity building and transfer of technology requests from affected countries.

The North maintained that phrases related to 'urgent action for Africa' were vague and not provided for in the convention and were, thus, outside the mandate of INCD. The UK representative argued that they could not provide for emergency relief of capacity building as suggested by G77 and China, and such measures could only be taken up at CoP-1.

Even the intervention on the convention executive secretary, Hama Arba Diallo, failed to sort out the matter. The North maintained that before the convention came into force, article 7 of the convention's implementation annexe for Africa only authorized African countries to undertake activities related to the preparation of action programmes.

Global or local: Northern countries had objected to the South's reference to desertification as a 'global' problem while negotiating the convention. The EU and Canada argued that a reference to the widespread nature of desertification could be made without calling it a 'global' problem, since this has a special meaning with regard to costs and global benefits.

According to the EU, the term 'global' had specific connotations as articulated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate change (UNFCCC), in which the responsibility of industrialized countries had been established and certain obligations assumed. Northern countries wanted to avoid

any possible links that would alter the nature of future assistance and in essence make it an obligation.

G77 on the other hand asserted that desertification and drought should be considered a global problem in the broadest sense. Malaysia alleged that the Northern countries were consciously trying to omit the reference to international cooperation and to transfer the responsibility of combating desertification to developing nations. "If the South can solve all problems of desertification there would be no need for these negotiations," delegates from Saudi Arabia and Mali said. Southern delegates also felt that the use of the word 'global' would allow for a claim to be made for GEF funds for combating desertification.³¹

The draft resolution adopted finally recalled the link established between the global dimension of desertification and effects in each region. The final consensus paragraph in the text says:

Acknowledging that desertification and drought are problems of global dimension in that they affect all regions of the world and that joint action of the international community is needed to combat desertification and/or mitigate the effects of drought.

However, the list of North-South disagreements was far from over. The next bout was over who should benefit from the convention. Australia, itself 'affected' by desertification, said that since developing countries are not the only ones suffering from desertification, 'developing' should be substituted with 'affected', in one of the clauses in the preamble to the convention text. Finally, affected countries, in particular in developing countries were accepted.

Australia and some Northern nations wanted the words 'poverty eradication' in the list of priorities to be replaced with 'poverty alleviation', since 'eradication' of poverty seems like an impossible task. When Brazil argued that 'poverty eradication' is a phrase adopted from Agenda 21, it was retained.

³¹ Op. cite., Anil Agarwal et al., (eds), *Green Politics*, p 177.

Technology transfer: African countries wanted access to specific technologies that could give them early warning of impending droughts and assessments of the extent of land degradation through satellite imagery, aerial photography and geographic information systems. To be sure protection of intellectual property rights, both the EU and the US wanted references to specific technologies deleted. The text to protection of intellectual property rights is weak on commitments from the North. The text is replaced with phrases such as ‘facilitates access to technology’ or inter alia ‘use of technology to assess land degradation’, which makes it non-mandatory for the North to part with its technology.

The final Convention has both a global and national framework for action. It accepts causes of desertification to be global, national and local processes, and contains obligations for both rich and poor governments. In an important move for Southern countries, the Convention recognises the participation of local communities as requisite for development.

After 13 months of tough negotiations in five sessions in Nairobi, Geneva, New York and Paris – and against many observers’ expectations – the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (to give it its full name or, UNCCD), was adopted on time on 17 June 1994 and opened for signature in Paris in October that year. Till now 191 countries have signed the Convention.

The preamble of the Convention appreciates “the significance of the past efforts and experience of State and international organizations in combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought, particularly in implementing the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification”, but it recognizes that ‘despite efforts in the past, progress... has not met expectations.’ It adds, “ a new and more effective approach is needed at all levels within the frameworks of sustainable development”.³²

³² <http://www.unccd.de/> or, gopher://gopher.undp.org/00/unconfs/deser/off/english/des-conv.en

The Convention, symbolizing agreement between developed and developing countries on the need for a global coalition to address desertification, is different from previous attempts to combat the crisis, since it is legally binding. Countries that accede to it will be obliged to implement it. Unlike some other international environmental treaties, it includes concrete national commitments for practical action, particularly at the local level where desertification must primarily be fought, and places great emphasis on the machinery needed to implement it and monitor its progress. Finalizing the Convention is one of the most important achievements to date in the follow-up to the Earth Summit, bringing the spirit of Rio, literally, down to earth.

CHAPTER III

NEGOTIATIONS AT CONFERENCE OF PARTIES (CoP) MEETINGS

With the first CoP scheduled in September 1997 and funds still elusive, the most affected southern countries hoped Earth Summit-II or Rio + 5 (the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) held in June 1997 in New York could have reviewed the Rio commitments of financial help of northern countries. Even there, the North stuck adamantly to its position. ODA from OECD countries had slipped from 0.37 per cent of their GNP in 1980, to 0.27 per cent in 1995.¹ This development would automatically weaken the convention since GM is dependent mainly on existing funds.

Agenda at CoP-1

The first CoP was held from September 29 – October 10 in Rome, Italy in 1997. A collaborative arrangement was planned out between IFAD, World Bank and UNDP to mobilise resources for the Convention. Decisions were taken for funding and the venue of the permanent secretariat. The Convention would have had no budget but for the sheer persistence and determination of Mahmoud Ould El-Ghaouth, chairperson of the Committee of the Whole (CoW), the highest body of the Convention which ratifies decisions. El-Ghaouth forced parties to come to a decision on the last day of CoP-1.

Several closed ad hoc working groups consisting of representatives of G77, the EU and other developed countries had been squabbling over the budget for various elements of the Convention during two weeks of Rome negotiations. Though an agreement had been reached at an earlier meeting of CoW, some countries reopened the issue late on the last day of the conference.²

¹ "Talk Show", *Down To Earth*, July 15, 1997, p 19.

² Anil Agarwal et al. (eds), *Green Politics: Global Environmental Negotiations-I*, CSE Publication, New Delhi, 1999, p 179.

The Global Mechanism (GM) was formally accepted with intense exchange of words. The annual budget for 1999 had been agreed at US \$6.1 million, with an additional US \$1 million for conference services. There was no agreement on the breakup on various elements of the budget. The Netherlands' representative wanted the budget passed with breakup figures. The G77 spokesperson from Tanzania joined hands with the Netherlands representative saying that the amount allocated to the GM was only around US \$0.5 million, which was inadequate. Chairperson disagreed on breakup figures and mooted that whatever to be passed it must be for the convention as a whole. The Netherlands representatives accused the chairperson of hindering consensus. The Tanzanian representative suggested another breakup, which the executive secretary did not agree with. The Netherlands representatives snapped back saying that the executive secretary need not give his opinion, since the matter was being discussed at the intergovernmental level. While during the exchange of cacophony, the Chairperson categorized the situation as a second class Convention meeting.

Other nations such as Senegal, Swaziland, Antigua and Barbuda joined hand with the chair and dismissed the positions of the Netherlands and Tanzania. They told the Tanzanian representative to speak for himself, and not for G77. After almost three hours of debates, the breakup proposed by the chair, with the provision of revising it at the next CoP at Dakar, was accepted, with the GM getting approximately US \$1 million.³ After hectic lobbying on part of UNDP and IFAD, it was decided that the GM would be housed in IFAD. Canada, Spain and Germany lobbied to have the permanent secretariat in their countries, but Bonn was finally voted for the permanent office of the UNCCD. African countries lobbied and got their demand to host next CoP meeting in Dakar in 1998.

Dakar meeting of Cop-2

CoP-2 was expected to put to rest the teething problems faced by the Convention, including mechanism, and clear the coast for further work on the 'bottom up' approach that the convention espouses in the fight against desertification in future

³ Anju Sharma, "Rio's Stepchild", *Down To Earth*, vol. 7, no. 17, 1999, pp. 24-25.

meetings. But, delegates were once again mired in administrative squabbles, which even spilled over to the agenda of CoP-3.

Southern countries came to Dakar knowing that disappointment was in store for them. The GM, which was to be operational from January 1, 1998, was yet to begin for lack of funds. They reiterated what they had said at Rome, and asked countries to provide the necessary resources. The survey and evaluation of existing networks and institutions, which UNEP was to conduct on behalf of CST was also, delayed.

CoP-2 was meant to oversee the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between IFAD and the Convention secretariat. However, southern countries were disappointed as decision was postponed to the next meeting because of minor differences over the wording of the MoU, though the parties were asked to function as if it was already operational.

The newly appointed GM managing director, Per Ryden, admitted it would take time before the GM has any impact, given its limited resources. He grouped the mechanism's tasks into eight activities, including partnership building, channeling and matchmaking, developing a database, identifying innovative techniques, and marketing and communicating GM as a framework for addressing land degradation issues. The IFAD reported that on the formation of a facilitation committee - a collaborative arrangement between IFAD, UNDP and the World Bank expanded to include the UNCCD secretariat, GEF and other regional banks.

There was friction once again while deciding the functions of the Convention secretariat, which was shifted to Bonn. The secretariat had put forward a medium strategy for its functioning. The proposal which found support from G77 and China, was opposed by most countries in the industrialised world, who felt the secretariat should restrict itself to a facilitating and coordinating role, while the operational role should be left to the GM, CST and specialised agencies involved in combating desertification.

Developing countries saw this as an attempt to reduce the secretariat to its lowest common denominator, which would tend to confirm that UNCCD was a 'poor relation' of the other Rio conventions.⁴

There were disagreements on the administrative and support arrangements for the secretariat as well. Though the meeting passed a decision which called on the UN General Assembly to finance the conference servicing costs arising from the CoP sessions and its subsidiary bodies from the UN regular programme budget for the period of their institutional linkage. Delegates from the US (not yet an active member of UNCCD) said these costs should be borne solely by the country parties on a voluntary basis. The US Congress proposes to withhold its share of conference servicing costs for all conventions funded from the UN regular budget.⁵

Disagreement on voting procedures continued at CoP-2, with G77 countries wanting a 'simple majority vote' instead of a 'two-thirds majority vote' when consensus was lacking on convention decisions. The group consisting of Japan, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand insisted on consensus decisions, particularly on financial matters. The discussion will continue at CoP-3 scheduled to be held in Recife, Brazil, from November 15-26, 1999. It is expected to consider the implementation reports from Africa, modalities and activities of the GM, strengthening of relationships with other conventions and arbitration and conciliation procedures.

The desertification convention lays heavy emphasis on the 'bottom up' approach and traditional methods to combat desertification. Countries are expected to prepare NAPS with active participation from affected communities and civil society, and taking into account traditional methods. Women's groups and local communities are integral to the action plans. At CoP-2 CST, which was set up to advise parties to the convention established a 10-member panel from around the world to elaborate links between traditional and modern knowledge in fighting desertification. The next session of CST was asked to focus on early warning systems, including water

⁴ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol.4, no. 127, 1998.
<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/download/asc/enbo4127e>.

⁵ Supriya Akerkar, "Will the Deserts Retreat?", *Down To Earth*, vol.6, no.13, November 30, 1999, pp.35-37.

management and protection. The panel is expected to identify and report to CST successful experiences and conclusions relating to threats and other constraints: such as socioeconomic impacts confronting traditional knowledge and practices; strategies for integrating traditional and local knowledge with modern knowledge based on specific case histories; and mechanisms for promoting and exchanging successful approaches.⁶

The CST established an ad hoc panel to follow up its discussion on linkages between traditional and modern knowledge. Delegates considered, but deferred to COP-3, decisions on the Secretariat's medium-term strategy, adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the COP and IFAD regarding the GM, and the G-77/China proposal to establish a Committee on the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

A Dakar Declaration was issued by a parliamentary round table attended by 36 parliamentarians from 22 countries. The declaration noted the link between desertification and poverty. Parliamentarians from the South called for the equal treatment of the three Rio conventions during the meet.

The World Bank spoke of making soil projects eligible as clean development mechanism (CDM) projects under the Kyoto Protocol of the UNFCCC. That seems to be more an attempt to dangle another carrot in front of G77 and China and thus draw them into participating in what is currently a controversial mechanism. Southern participants felt the World Bank was deliberately avoiding climatic variations as a cause of desertification, for fear that Southern countries would ask for compensation under UNFCCC.

CoP-3: Recife Initiative

A 'Recife Initiative' adopted at CoP-3 convened in Recife, Brazil from November 15-26, 1999, calls for the adoption of a declaration at Cop-4 to strengthen the implementation of the convention, calling for time-bound, concrete commitments.

⁶ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol.4, no. 127, 1998.
<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/download/asc/enbo4127e>.

It stresses also that the declaration should cover an agreed period and be focused on a limited number of specific thematic and sectoral areas to be determined and consistent with action programs under the convention. An initiative to start the process for a declaration on implementation, which is to be adopted at the next CoP, seems like uselessly delaying a process that calls for urgent action. Instead of focussing on a much-needed discussion on implementation, the meeting followed the previous meetings and struck to administrative and structural issues.⁷

Discussions on trade and desertification: In the plenary session, UNEP executive director, Klaus Topfer, related the global phenomenon of desertification to climate change, biodiversity, famine and social and political conflict. He further added that it would be a mistake to say the UNCCD concerns only developing countries. He underlined the close linkages between desertification and poverty.⁸ In spite of all this, CoP-3 did not witness any discussion on trade patterns and international economic policies that stimulate desertification.

Administrative Convention: CoP-3 was marked by the absence of participation by OECD countries and regions other than Africa. On the one hand, Japan and the US had still not ratified the Convention and did not participate in the CoP meetings (the US decision to ratify the convention came later). Developing countries felt that many delegates of the developed countries sent to the Convention were not senior enough to make commitments. G77 and China had been constantly asking for a committee to review implementation of the convention (CRIC), since the beginning of the Convention. CoP-2 promised them at least a discussion on this. At CoP-3, however, developed countries categorically refused to have a discussion on it. Tensions and mistrust between negotiators prevented the talks.⁹

Cop-3 will also be remembered for missing the opportunity to capitalise on its first chance to identify best practices and shared experiences based on national reports. A lack of momentum plagued the conference from the outset, as thorny,

⁷ Earth Negotiation Bulletin, vol. 4, no. 138, November 29, 1999.

<<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/download/asc/enb04138e.txt>. >

⁸ Anil Agarwal et al. (eds), *Poles Apart: Global Environmental Negotiations-II*, CSE Publication, New Delhi, 2001, p 308.

⁹ Ibid.

unresolved issues trail from CoP to CoP without finding solutions. This conference was termed as 'Conference of Polite conversations'.¹⁰

Cop-4: No momentum

German President Johannes Rau opened CoP-4 in Bonn, 2000, urging countries not to shirk their responsibility for short-term gains, and to be sufficiently self-critical to admit their failure to combat poverty and realize development in developing countries. He pointed out that desertification was threatening the livelihoods of a billion people. To quote his speech: "A number of mistakes were made in the past owing to Western arrogance or a lack of sensitivity. At times, the industrial countries have called to mind the ostrich burying its head in the sand, and others bent on what some have called eco-colonialism".¹¹

Finance remains a problem: The meeting saw the very controversial issues of finance come to a head, as African countries demanded that the convention receive funding from the GEF.¹² UN secretary-general Kofi Annan and CCD executive secretary Hama Arba Diallo, who called on GEF to open a new window for projects linked to CCD, supported their demand. Diallo pointed out that 31 countries had finalised and submitted NAPs, but not one plan of action had benefited from a concrete initiative from donors.

Meanwhile, in a statement read out on his behalf, Annan appealed to donors to mobilise funds for affected developing countries and called for a designation of a GEF window to finance CCD implementation.¹³ To quote Annan: "This convention needs a financial mechanism, like the one the international community has already provided for its sister conventions – those on climate change and biological diversity – and now also for the new convention on persistent organic pollutants".¹⁴ In a special message, he asked the European Community to act with more decisiveness if the convention is to be implemented effectively. Since 1991, US \$ 881 million has been

¹⁰ Anil Agarwal et al. (eds), *Poles Apart: Global Environmental Negotiations-II*, CSE Publication, New Delhi, 2001, p 307.

¹¹ Anon, "Desertification Threatens 1 Billion People Worldwide", *Panafrican News Agency*, Dakar, December 12, 2000. <<http://allafrica.com/stories/desert/>>

¹² Sidy Gaye, "Ten Year Commitment Declaration at CoP-4", *Panafrican News Agency*, Dakar, December 13, 2000. <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200012130193.html>>

¹³ http://www.unccd.int/publicinfo/pressrel/showpressrel.php?pr=press15_06_01.

¹⁴ Anon, "Annan Urges Commitment on Treaties", *Panafrican News Agency*, Dakar, December 18, 2000. <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200012180519.html>>

allotted for climate-related projects by GEF, and US \$ 991 million allotted for biodiversity projects. Desertification has received 'indirect' funding to the tune of US \$350 million from the mechanism, for projects that also comply with the goals of the other two conventions. UNEP, meanwhile, estimates that much as US \$10-22 billion per year is needed to combat desertification.¹⁵

Developing countries argued that they had met their obligations of the convention but had serious problem in implementation due to lack of finances. It was in November 2000 meeting, the GEF council had requested the Facility for a proposal to strengthen support for CCD. Along with this was a recent decision taken to designate GEF the financial mechanism for the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). G77 and China agreed to this only on condition that similar consideration would be given to the financing of CCD at the second GEF assembly, to be held in 2002. African delegates declared that it was not acceptable for them to envisage direct funding by the GEF of activities related to the new convention on POPs, while the same partners of the North, who recommended it, continue to refuse desertification in the same access.

Donor countries, however, were reluctant to take such a step. France claimed that it was possible to mobilise resources for CCD without forming a formal financial instrument. "Too many false problems are raised without the ultimate motivations being clarified," the French delegates said. "What again is lacking is the efficient use of funds to the benefit of the population who should be the true beneficiaries, and the rationalization of funding channels." Yet again, the North continued to argue that GEF is directed only to 'global' issues with 'incremental costs', and did not apply to desertification, whose causes are more 'local'.¹⁶

At the end there was no decision taken to solve the funding issue instead, the countries presented simply welcomed the collaboration between CCD and GEF, and requested the executive secretary to follow up the discussion at the GEF council meeting, and report back to CoP-5. However, the issue was taken further at the GEF

¹⁵ Anon, Financing Action to Combat Desertification, UNCCD, Bonn, 2000. Also can be reached at <http://www.unccd.int/publicinfo/factsheets/fs8-eng.html>>

¹⁶ *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, vol.4, no. 149, December 2000, <http://www.iisd.ca/vol04/enb04149e>>

council meeting in May 2001, where council members agreed to put forward a recommendation to the GEF second assembly, calling for a new GEF window for desertification projects.

Developing countries wanted GEF as a funding mechanism but also wanted the GM to carry on its work trying to mobilise funds from sources such as bilateral aid and the private sector. IFAD announced that while there has been a steep increase in the demand for the services of GM, bilateral support had been sporadic and insufficient. CoP president, Brazilian environment minister Sarney Filho, called on governments to reaffirm commitments to support the GM and assured that it is allocated the necessary resources to perform its duties effectively. There was no discussion on the operational strategy of GM¹⁷. The core budget of GM for the year 2000 was US \$ 1.3 million and US \$ 1.35 million for the year 2001.

Some answers on implementation

The ad hoc working group on implementation, established during CoP3 to review and analyse reports on NAPs, subregional and regional action programmes (SRAPs and RAPS) and to propose recommendations for further implementation of the convention, started work. It met eight times, and presented an interim report. The report highlighted action at the three levels, and listed problems such as insufficient funding, capacity, coordination, difficulties in information dissemination outdated domestic policies and legislation and inconsistent donor requirements.

The working group was asked to convene a 15-day meeting to complete its review of reports submitted at CoP-3 and CoP-4. On behalf of G77 and China, Nigeria convened a meeting to discuss a mechanism for regularly reviewing CCD implementation. It was felt that “the review of reports represents the most important accomplishment of this conferences, as reports reflects the enormous efforts made by affected countries to combat desertification”. A proposal by G 77 and China asking parties to submit their recommendations for review and implementaion of the convention, including the establishment of CRIC, for consideration at Cop-5 was adopted.¹⁸ An implementation annex, with provisions for the preparation of action programmes, technical and scientific cooperation, and financial resources was

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

adopted for Central and Eastern Europe, similar to those already existing for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean.

A declaration to improve CCD implementation, prompted by the Recife Initiative, was also adopted. Among other things, the declaration reaffirms obligations for funding and technology transfer invites developing country action on NAPS, and calls on countries to take action to facilitate access to GET funding.

CoP-5: Establishment of Reviewing UNCCD

CoP-5 met from 1-13 October 2001, in Geneva, Switzerland, and the CST met in parallel from 2-5 October. The CoP focused on setting the modalities of work for the two-year interval before COP-6. Progress was made in a number of areas, most notably, in the establishment of the CRIC, identification of modalities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST, and in the enhancement of the CCD's financial base following strong support for a proposal by the GEF to designate land degradation as another focal area for funding.

CRIC-1: The first meeting of the CRIC was held at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headquarters in Rome, Italy, from 11-22 November 2002. The CRIC was established in accordance with decision 1/COP.5 to regularly review the implementation of the CCD, draw conclusions, and propose concrete recommendations to the COP on further implementation steps. CRIC-1 considered presentations from the five CCD regions, addressing the seven thematic issues under review:

Participatory processes involving civil society, NGOs and community-based organizations; legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements; linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies; measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land, drought and desertification monitoring and assessment; early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought; access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how; and resource

mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusions of partnership agreements.¹⁹

The meeting also considered information on financial mechanisms in support of the CCD s implementation, advice provided by the CST and the GM, and the Secretariat's report on actions aimed at strengthening the relationships with other relevant conventions and organizations.

CRIC-1 adopted recommendations on the programme of work for CRIC-2, noting that CRIC sessions held during the ordinary sessions of the COP will: consider the comprehensive report of the inter-sessional session; review the policies, operational modalities and activities of the GM; review reports prepared by the Secretariat on the execution of its functions; and consider reports on collaboration with the GEF.²⁰

COP-6: Beginning of Implementation Phase

Having strengthened the UNCCD at previous CoP, the sixth CoP marked the transition from awareness raising to implementation. There certainly was scope to scale a critical threshold by finally taking important and overdue steps. These included designating the GEF as a financial mechanism for the CCD and identifying CRIC criteria for the COP-7 review. Two factors served as an additional impetus to making significant progress: the presence of Cuban President Fidel Castro, known for his ability to do much with very little, and the first anniversary of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which identified combating desertification as a tool for eradicating poverty.

The 'Havana Declaration', which resulted from the two days discussions among the 13 Heads of State and Government and was appended to the more substantial CoP decisions, while falling short of addressing the specific objectives of CoP-6, reaffirms a strong political commitment to combating desertification.

¹⁹ *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 173, 8 September 2003.

Coverage of the COP-5 can be found at: <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/desert/cop5/>

²⁰ *Ibid.*

During two weeks of negotiations in Cuba's capital port city, the most controversial issue was the programme and budget, and little headway was made on the regional coordination units (RCUs). In contrast, the designation of the GEF as the CCD's financial mechanism was the biggest success of CoP-6. Progress was also made with regard to synergies with other conventions. With concern being voiced in the corridors, over the lack of transparency, the Secretariat's role must also be examined. Finally, it is important to gauge the impact of the high-level segment on the future operation of the CCD, and the role of emerging regional groups.

Financial Issues: Agreement on the GEF's new role was clearly a high point of COP-6, marking the beginning of a new era for the CCD. Although the GEF will make available US\$500 million over three years to land degradation and desertification programmes, much less than for its other four focal areas (climate change, biodiversity, international waters and ozone depletion). Significantly, the CCD will also receive a psychological boost, hopefully leaving behind its image of the poor sister convention and standing on a par with other multilateral environmental agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UNCCC.

Programme and Budget: The debate on the Secretariat's programme and budget once again brought to the surface a certain distrust held by some Parties toward the Secretariat. The negotiations also illustrated the long-standing tensions between developed and developing countries regarding the CCD, with the US advocating nominal zero increase in the budget, and the African Group bolstering it by 35%. The Group's reasoning was that the CCD is an important vehicle for addressing the economic woes of developing countries, in particular Africa, and a small Secretariat budget greatly reduces any prospect for making headway on this issue.

The general discontent over the budget strongly articulated by Canada in the closing Plenary. The Canadian delegate expressed regret that the budget negotiations put accountability, transparency and effectiveness into doubt. Canada warned that it would not hesitate to redirect its funds into processes that combat desertification more

efficiently if the three above principles remain neglected at CoP-7.²¹ The final compromise to increase the Secretariat budget by 5% is a reflection of growing pressure from donors to channel financial resources into ground-level projects, rather than to an administrative structure. At the same time, it remains to be seen how the Secretariat can implement the many requests put to it by COP-6, with a truncated capacity.

Role of the Secretariat: Throughout the CoP, an undercurrent of skepticism towards the Secretariat's posture ran through the corridors. Two issues were the basis for concern: lack of transparency evidenced by the mode of electing CoP officers, and financial support provided to select NGOs. The controversy over the elections raised the legal problem of sequence: could the CRIC Vice-Chairs be elected before the CRIC Chair? With the Rules of Procedure being unclear on the sequence, Parties were confused, and the Executive Secretary's clarification that consultations had been held was questioned. This episode proved once again that the Secretariat must be seen to ensure the democratic and rule-bound processes of environmental governance.

There is also a lack of clarity regarding criteria used to fund NGOs to attend the negotiations. According to one observer, the Secretariat does not shy away from funding friendly NGOs. To be fair, the Secretariat's efforts to involve a larger number of developing countries NGOs and its dedication to making the CCD a success deserves recognition.

CCD Effectiveness: Several agenda items were of direct relevance to speeding up the transition to the implementation phase, including synergies between conventions, the CST's Group of Experts, benchmarks and indicators, the CRIC's new programme of work, and RCUs. With the linkages between climate change, desertification and biodiversity, Parties to the three Rio conventions have been working on developing synergies and drawing on experiences gained in each other's processes, while trying to avoid duplication of work. The outcome of the negotiations on the synergies decision was far from groundbreaking, and the three Executive

²¹ *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 173, 8 September 2003.
Coverage of the COP-6 can be found at: <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/desert/cop6/>

Secretaries failed to convene in their scheduled Joint Liaison Group meeting. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the CCD Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) did, nevertheless, show that advances are taking place. Parties hoped that COP-7 will see significant development in this area and that cooperation with other conventions will take place at the national and regional levels as well.

Emerging Regional Interest: COP-6 was also noted by the emergence of several regional interest groups that made themselves heard and can be expected to play a growing role in future negotiations. The Annex V (Central and Eastern European) countries are expected to have an impact on CCD implementation but are presently going through a difficult period of adjustment, tinged by a conflict of interests. Several EU-acceding members are driven by divided group loyalties, adding confusion to the process: some countries are donors, some are affected countries, yet others are undecided about their final status. Their current goal is to set common priorities and elaborate a regional coordination agenda. They may open new avenues of capacity building and technology transfer, especially on advanced space monitoring.

Apart from the high-level segment, COP-6 will most likely be remembered for finalizing the decision that opened the GEF to funding desertification programmes. This achievement, along with bringing order to the CCD structures can be expected to bring the CCD closer to breaching the implementation gap. On the other hand, the CCD Secretariat faces new challenges, such as a downsized budget and the need to build credibility.

The new focus on implementation, rather than on awareness raising, places a great responsibility on the Secretariat. If the CCD does not address the new challenges it faces, in particular the reality of reduced financial contributions and wavering political commitment from some donor Parties, the future of the only developing countries Convention may be bleak indeed.

Role of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)

A majority of the NGOs participating in the desertification negotiations was African, and many could be classified as grassroots organizations. An increasing number of NGOs attended each CCD meeting. At the first INCD 1993, 47 NGOs were registered in the list of participants, and, by the first CoP meeting in 1997, a total of 187 NGOs had actively participated.

NGOs coordinated activities, lobbied delegates, prepared statements, and held seminars at INCDs. The NGOs attending the desertification negotiations can be divided into experienced and inexperienced NGOs²². Experienced participants tended to represent organizations that cover a number of environmental issues and had previously lobbied at other international negotiations. They arrived with proper homework and ready to contribute to the debate and to pursue their lobbying strategies. The inexperienced representatives were involved in this specific negotiation only and acquired know-how during the process. A majority of the NGOs attending the desertification negotiations belonged to the second category.

During the CCD process, NGOs created Le Réseau de ONG sur la Désertification et la Sécheresse (RIOD), a worldwide network for cooperation between NGOs involved in the implementation of the Convention. RIOD has gained recognition as an NGO focal point and the CCD Secretariat and government now use RIOD to channel information to all NGOs interested in the COD.

Analysis shows that NGOs were more influential than the scientific advisers' sessions and to some government ministries; also they provided special advice to and interacted with government delegations while present at the INCD sessions. Additionally, they had some ability to ensure that certain issues were incorporated in the Convention.

It has been noted that there were no international NGOs like Greenpeace, WWF, IUCN, no lawyers, no former diplomats, and no experienced professional lobby. Unfortunately, there is no pressure from Western NGOs on their governments to take desertification issues seriously. Greenpeace, WWF and FOE and

²² Elisabeth Corell, "Non-State Actor Influence in the Negotiations of the Convention to Desertification", *International Negotiation*, no.4, 1999, pp197-223.

other NGOs would find it difficult to raise funds on land degradation. A survey carried out in 1998 by the German NGO found a marked lack of enthusiasm on the part of Northern NGOs for the desertification convention.²³ Desertification was not a priority issue for most Northern NGOs. However, this absence contributed to the cohesiveness that increased NGO influence. The 'non-appearance' of larger, Northern NGOs with their own agendas and political considerations actually made it easier for the participating NGOs to coordinate their activities. NGOs that had desertification as their central focus did not have to consolidate their views with representatives', large NGOs which consider desertification to be only one issue on the wider environmental agenda. Moreover, the participating NGOs had more of a common focus on the development aspect of the environmental problem desertification and were not simply focussed on remedying an environmental "harm. However, the desertification issue did not attract the large and sometimes most aggressive lobbyists, which allowed for the attending NGOs to build up more of a relationship of confidence with the government delegations.

Lastly, no business NGOs were present to divert delegates 'attention or provide alternative views, which are usually in opposition to the environment and development NGOs.

However, the NGOs at the desertification negotiations coordinated themselves and presented unanimous statements without major internal disputes or opponents impairing their work. This was facilitated by the fact that the participating NGOs, despite a lack of lobbying experience among some of them, were a relatively homogenous group focussed on improving the conditions of people living in arid areas. They presented a united front to the negotiators and maintained good relations with the CCD Secretariat and the INCD Chairman. All these factors together increased the ability of the NGOs to influence the negotiating process and its outcome. Southern NGOs, meanwhile, have participated in UNCCD proceedings in great numbers. Two half-day sessions are set aside during CoPs for NGOs to make presentations to the plenary.

²³ Lyn Allen et al, *The Combat of Desertification In Global partnership: A challenge for Civil Society*, Forum Environment and Development, NGO Working Group on desertification, Germany, 1998, pp. 137-148.

CONCLUSION

The convention to combat desertification is comprehensive statement that touches on a number of socio-economic concerns linked to desertification and the allocation and use of natural resources in general, and the management of specific dryland ecosystems in particular. It is interesting to see as to what policies did the World Bank follow on this convention. Many of the concerns addressed by the Convention are important to development institutions such as the World Bank. As we have seen, the financial powers of the Convention are too insufficient to be binding on the recipient country and this is one of the reasons it could not do the necessary work it was supposed to do.

Between 1990 and 1998, the World Bank approved financing for 159 projects directed wholly or partially at natural resources degradation in countries with significant areas of drylands. Direct lending of World Bank in this period was exceeding \$18 billion. Of this total, 54 of the projects were primarily directed at land degradation with lending of \$ 1.8 billion. A regional breakdown shows that the major share; 40 percent of all projects (around \$ 8.9 billion and averaged about \$ 9 billion) resulting in a total dryland involvement focusing on natural resource management are in Sub-Saharan Africa, 10 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 13 percent in Middle East and North Asia, 13 percent in South Asia, 9 percent in East Asia and 7 percent in Europe and Central Asia.¹

Whenever World Bank gave financial support it made sure that community should involve in the process but irony is that maximum projects failed because of their bureaucratic hurdles created by the governments. The idea of National Action plan and participatory groups failed miserably.

The difficulties involved in developing participatory organisations are illustrated by the experience of the second livestock project in Mauritania, which aimed to support pastoral associations as a means of promoting important range productivity and, thereby improving incomes². After this programme World Bank realised that flexibility in implementation is likely to be essential for success.

¹ *New Opportunities For Development: The Desertification Convention*, A report of World Bank, Washington DC, 1998, p. 4.

² *Mauritania: Second Livestock Project*, Impact Evaluation Report, Operational Evaluation Department, World Bank, 1998.

Commonly the process of development is accompanied by, and dependent on, the creation of a broader and more development oriented local leadership than that provided by existing local structures.³

During the 1990's, World Bank undertook several drought recovery operations. One of the most ambitious was in Zimbabwe in response to the major 1991 drought. Most of the operations supported by World Bank are regional level, which causes the fund crunch for UNCCD. At the global level Global Environment Facility (GEF) was created but the fund was not sufficient. GEF was created to provide grants and concessional funding to meet the agreed instrumental costs of measures to achieve agreed global environmental benefits in the areas of biological diversity, climate change, international waters and ozone layer depletion, land degradation, desertification and deforestation.

In 1995 only GEF recognised that land degradation problems can be funded through it. World Bank is one of the implementing agencies of GEF so it tried to increase the GEF activities. Though World Bank initially interested in local and regional level programmes but Trans-national scale funding was added into its lending portfolio. In addressing these Trans-national, Trans-boundary environmental problems, an integrated programme is designed and co-ordinated. Examples of local level were community based natural resource and wildlife management project in Burkinafaso and Ivory Coast, the village based resource management project in Mali and Burkinafaso, and the Middle East desertification initiative.

A review of the bank's approach and performance in natural resource management found that its efforts in this area were spasmodic.⁴ Bank's primary focus was an overall economic development. Resource issues came up only when some countries or all of the country team had particular interest in the issue or alternatively showed by the borrower.

³ Tiffen, M M. Mortomore & F. Gichuki, *More People Less Erosion: Environmental Recovery In Kenya*, John Wily and Sons, London, 1994, p. 297.

⁴ *Renewable Resource Management In Agriculture*, Operational Evaluation Department, World Bank, 1989.

There were various action plans made by the countries to tackle desertification but in absence of proper financial help the plan did not work out. In many cases these action plans have had limited effectiveness. In many cases they were insufficiently integrated with and reflective of the plans of national development planning. Not only the finance is the big problem but also the approach of various countries towards UNCCD was also not encouraging. It can be argued that it is related to other problems also but there was no significant step to link it with other international conventions for long time.

In 1992 United Nations Conference on environment and development held in Rio de Janeiro International community adopted Rio declaration or Agenda 21. In Agenda 21, desertification also mentioned as a dangerous problem Agenda 21 recognised that desertification problem is intimately linked with three major global environmental issues, climate change and global warming, conservation and utilisation of biodiversity and international waters.

Ironically all these conventions were ratified well before UNCCD. The governing council of UNEP considered the issue of biological diversity conservation in 1987, after a number of states expressed their concern about the disappearance of species and the need for adequate protection of biodiversity.⁵ Due to the panic created by the member countries the convention on Biological diversity was adopted on 22nd May and was opened for signing at the Earth Summit in June 1992 but on desertification there was no such urgency. In 1992 Countries just decided to start negotiations to have a convention. Biodiversity is very much related to the process of desertification. Drylands, which becomes deserts after rough weather, have different kind of flora and fauna. Various medicinal plants, herbs and animals found in drylands and deserts. Once the drylands starts to become deserts, many species of animals and plants perished due to the adverse weather condition. CBD tries to save those flora and fauna but there are no joint efforts with UNCCD in the beginning. CBD can only be applied properly once we start to fight desertification because loss of biodiversity is just a part of the desertification process. UNCCD also confirms this. The Convention says “ The parties to convention bearing in mind the relationship between desertification and other environmental problems of global dimensions facing the

⁵ Mukund Govind Rajan, *Global Environmental Politics*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, Pp. 192.

international and national communities.⁶ It also bears in mind the contribution that combating the desertification can make to achieve the objectives of the United Nations framework convention on climate change, the convention on biological diversity and other related environmental conventions.⁷

In 1992 during Rio Summit too much emphasis was given on the climate change. It was the first priority for all the countries except Sudano-Sahel region. They pushed hard for some agreement on desertification. It was one of the by-product of climate change i.e. change in climate increase the chances of desertification. Similarly the deserts also affects the Environment. Once the linkage was recognised in UNCCD, UNFCCC should have worked with UNCCD but that doesn't happen at all.

The UNCCD also related to the forests. During the negotiations to have a convention on desertification, Northern countries asked South countries to have a convention on forest at the cost of a convention on desertification.⁸ So it was used as a bargaining chip. The rapid degradation in the forest land is also responsible for land degradation. One of the way to stop desertification is to plant more and more trees or increase the forest area all over. It means both of these were related but it never worked together. Forest convention remained primary for North always.

Desertification is also related to various water conventions. As we know droughts are part of the climate and water shortage phenomenon so these things are also related. There is one important convention named as Ramsar convention on wetlands of International importance. It was unusual among the environmental agreements in being focused very much on global technical issues like size management. It was signed in 1975. At that time also desertification was a grave threat but the world had only plan of action to combat desertification (PACD). PACD failed like anything. Ramsar treaty conserves migratory species and wetlands. The wetlands help in a way to combat the desertification physically. There are more than 1053 Ramsar sites covering more than 75 million hectares

⁶ *United Nations Convention To Combat Desertification In Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought And/Or Desertification Particularly In Africa*, UNEP Information Unit for Conventions, Geneva, 1994, p. 2.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Anil Agarwal et al, "Sands of Controversy", *Down to Earth*, Society for Environmental Communications, New Delhi, Vol 1, No 4, Jul 15 1992, p10.

around the world .If judged by the large number of wetlands listed for conservation and total wetland areas protected, this is a successful convention.⁹

This convention pressurised nations to conserve the listed areas in the convention. In last 30 years this convention and helped CBD and UNCCD in some ways. The Ramsar convention is now recognised by CBD as its lead agency in tackling wetland biodiversity issues. Linking itself to the Ramsar convention can be beneficial for UNCCD also, as there are various wetlands in the desertified areas of Asia and Africa. The state of Rajasthan in India has Thar desert and also Sambhar lake which is a Ramsar site. It shows the close relationship between these two international conventions.

The problem of desertification is also related to the trade practices of certain countries specially the countries of Northern Hemisphere. During the negotiation the countries like US , Belgium and others opposed it because they didn't want to fund for the problems of the African and Asian countries . The cash crop production by African countries caused heavy loss for them in terms of land but till date it had not been related. WTO treaties do not relate to these problems. The various recommendations and programmes aimed to eradicate poverty from these poor countries are not aimed to the root cause of land degradation but concentrated in other areas. Once the Northern countries will accept this linkage they will have to fund heavily for UNCCD so they are not agreeing on it.

From this description it can be said that the UNCCD can't be seen in isolation. Convention also realised it and encouraged co-ordination of activities carried out under its auspices and other international agreements. It took note of trends in the commitments of the international community to deal with problems of environment and development in an integrated manner. Examples include use of the meteorological and hydrological data and information, the promotion of alternative energy resources in place of fuel wood and efforts to address climatic factors that affect sustainable development. The centralities of these issues to the implementation of the convention were dependent on the country parties.

⁹ Cyrille de Klemn, *Biological Diversity Conservation And Law: Legal Mechanisms For Conserving Species And Ecosystems*, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper, no. 29.

ANALYSING THE CONVENTION

The rapid worldwide economic development of the past 100 years has been based on the classic economic concept that air and water are free resources and that land and minerals are inexhaustible. The consequences of this development seem inevitable, a world threatening increase in the environmental pollution and scarcity of natural resources. During the past 50 years as pollution and resource scarcity have grown from local and regional problems to international and global problems, they have become issues for negotiation, high on agencies of all developed and developing countries. Many of the environmental problems that we face today are unlike problems the world faced less than a century ago. The increasing deserts, scarcity of water, lessening of forests, the increasing toxicity of the water we drink and the Earth we walk on is so critical to the lives and well being of all of us, that "Environmental negotiation is nothing less than an exercise in negotiating the survival of society." ¹⁰

International negotiation is an ancient art, older than any nation, probably as old as organised tribes themselves. Generally, international negotiation was employed to resolve a conflict or dispute at one specific time, after which the matter was considered, closed. During the last century the nature of interrelationship among nations changed due to emergence in science, broad based economic growth of the world's population, worldwide integration of manufacturing and commerce and their services and transnational reach of the environmental problems. The issue of climate change, biodiversity and desertification are not a problem of one nation. During the negotiation for CCD there were several issues discussed right from the definition to the causes, even as the need for having a convention. After two years of intense negotiations UNCCD born but is that sufficient?

The desertification convention is primarily the result of the pressure applied by the African countries. Millions of people in Africa are affected by starvation only due to the drought and local land degradation problems. The convention took off with high expectations from drought prone countries of Africa. That is the reason why there was a big debate. Finally Africa was given priority. Article 8 of

¹⁰ Gunnar Sjøsted T (ed), *International Environmental Negotiation*, International Institute For Allied System Analysis (IIASA), Sage publications, London, 1993, p. 7.

the convention says “ In implementing this convention, the parties shall give priority to affected African country partly in the light of the particular situation prevailing in that particular situation prevailing in that region, while not neglecting affected developing country parties in other region.” But the problem started when every other region got special status. Asia got special mention in Annexe II. Northern Mediterranean in Annexe IV and Caribbean and Latin America in Annexe III. It shows there was special status to every southern region so no integrated approach can be taken.

This is one of the reasons why there is today less reason for justification and more for anxiety. The convention does not address issues such as accounting for the ecological costs of the commodities grown by the south.

The most important area of the convention is the finance mechanism. The convention talks about elimination of poverty starvation and hunger death but where is money to deal with these things. There were squabbling over money by the developed countries like US, Japan and Australia. No one is interested in putting money to fight desertification. These countries even tried to dismantle the negotiation. From last experiences it is unlikely that the convention will be able to mobilise the kind of funds that UNEP has suggested is needed. UNEP has suggested US \$ 10 billion per year for over the next 20 years. There was no separate fund created for anti-desertification programmes. The money has to come from GFF and later on from GM.

In these circumstances it is difficult to expect the convention will fulfil its aims. Not only that it might stop working due to fund crunch, then think of the lofty programmes prescribed for poverty reduction. According to the state of world rural poverty produced by the International Fund for the Agricultural Development (IFAD) in 1992, out of a population of some four billion people leaving in rural areas live below poverty line.¹¹

The challenge today lies in empowering and mobilising the labour of the marginalized billion to get out of their ecological poverty, create natural health and develop a robust economy. Tackling desertification needs funding and local government strategies. Community empowerment is the main pillar on which successful ecological programmes can be run. Though the convention asks for

¹¹ Anon, *State of World Rural Poverty*, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome, 1992.

participation of local people in the development of national action plans. Many governments in African countries lack the framework so at the village level effective management is not possible. National Action Programmes (NAP) is another in which convention failed miserably. Convention called for the national action plan by the government, by the time various government came up with their NAP's there was no fund to support them. In COP meeting various countries asked for the finances but never got that money. The CCD is to be implemented through national action programmes which promote a) preventive measures b) climatologic, meteorological and hydrological capabilities iii) institutional strengthening iv) regular implementation reviews. But no fund to apply those plans.

Not only finances there were problems in the technology transfer also. In the convention, countries agreed to have a committee on science and technology (CST) which can advice COP. It comprises experts. The basic work of CST was to gather knowledge about the expertise available to combat desertification. To collect new technologies and provide it to other countries i.e sharing of the knowledge and technology but it never happened. Northern countries neither interested in developing new technology nor they shared their existing technical knowledge with the poor countries. The role of CST is very weak. Instead of being an advisory body, it has become a body of documentation of facts. Instead of guiding the convention on policy matters, it has become nearly a body to carry out the secretariat's command. CST can play powerful role in utilising this information, incorporating it in its own research work and thereby, coming out with policies, strategies and action plans for implementation .At the moment, however, it seems content with its secondary position.

In absence of proper co-operation from powerful countries the convention was mired in administerial problems. Till COP IV in 2000, important decisions like the role of secretariat are still unresolved .The north and south continue to differ, as the former wants administrative role and the later an operational one for the secretariat. The negotiation ground became battleground for such things. With these absurd discussions there was no serious work carried out during the COP meeting many times.

One of the most important and crucial issues of trade and desertification are seldom discussed during the negotiations. Though it is quite clear that trade is a critical area in the scheme of things. The convention could have played a vital role by bringing these linkages to the forefront. By this, the convention can really serve the purpose for which it was created. The key to the problem of finance is also related to the linkages between trade and land degradation. Though the convention acknowledges that the socio-economic factors are responsible for desertification but never elaborated or discussed those economic factors which could have embraced the northern countries. During the negotiations one of the NGO representatives Fannie Mustapfa said, “ Shopping degradation requires fundamental structural adjustment at the global level, including trade measures supportive of the government. The use of lands belonging to the poor must be properly valued and funds must be made available to them through the system of international trade.”¹²

Their appeals did not matter to anyone. The countries like OECD and US countries were not present in the COP -3 where Recife initiative was taken. During this meeting only the executive director of UNEP Klaus Topfer related the global phenomena of desertification to the trade and conflicts. US ratifies the convention in 2000 but it is difficult to expect some major contribution from her in this area.

The role of NGO's in the convention is also not very encouraging as discussed in III chapter. Various big NGOs like Greenpeace were not active during the negotiation. All the active NGO's are from the Southern Hemisphere, which shows the policies of the non-governmental organizations also.

The convention perhaps for the first time provides the world with a framework for global and national plans, which can be seen as a bold step. It put responsibilities on rich and gives some relief to the poor. Rich countries have been obliged to look at the financial and trade structures and poor have been obliged to look at how they can help themselves. There is another hopeful sign for CCD i.e the growing awareness among people about the problem of desertification. Many countries are developing flexible mechanisms such as national desertification funds

¹² See, Fannie Mustepfa, “Trade and Desertification”, in Peter Koenz (ed), *Trade, Environment And Sustainable Development Views From Sub-Saharan Africa And Latin America: A Reader*, The United Nations University Institute of Advances Studies, Tokyo, 2000.

with the help of non-governmental organizations. These activities have been launched despite the fact that NAP's have not been implemented.¹³

The desertification is a sad story of one way economic and resource drain from the poorest parts of world to the richest. The desertification convention is a chain for the north and the south to enter into a global compact that will secure our common features. The scales are tilting to one side. The primary producers are getting poor which providing fund for rich. But the issue will become relevant only if the world's leaders are ready to take steps and we can only hope for that.

¹³ Anon, Report of the African Regional Preparatory Conference for CoP III, UNEP, Nairobi, Sept 27-Oct 1 1999.

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