



United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD): History and Bangladesh Context

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Background

The international community has long been recognized by that land degradation/desertification as a major economic, social and environmental problem of concern to many countries around the globe. Within this perspective the United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) in 1977 adopted a Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD). Highlighting this issue the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) concluded in 1991 that the problem of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas had intensified. As a result, the question of how to tackle desertification was still a major concern for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Rio Conference supported a new, integrated approach to the problem, emphasizing action to promote sustainable development at the community level. The Rio Conference called on the United Nations General Assembly to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INCD) to prepare, by June 1994, a Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa. In December 1992, the General Assembly agreed and adopted resolution 47/188 on this matter. The Convention was adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994 and entered into force on 26 December 1996, 90 days after the 50th ratification was received. As 194 countries and the European Union are Parties of April 2015. In the Convention, Desertification is defined as 'land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities' (UN General Assembly 1994).

Objectives of the Convention

The objective of this convention is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, through effective action at all levels, supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements, in the framework of an integrated approach which is consistent with Agenda 21. Achieving this objective will involve long-term integrated strategies that focus simultaneously, in affected areas, on improved productivity of land, and the rehabilitation, conservation and sustainable management of land and water resources, leading to improved living conditions, in particular at the community level.

Obligations under the UNCCD

The UNCCD is the only legal instrument dedicated to address the problems of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. Implementation of the Convention is an obligation to all the country Parties, although some provisions, such as the provisions for financing and technology transfer, make a distinction between the developing and developed country Parties. The affected developing country parties are to develop their National Action Programmes (NAPs) and follow through their implementation as per provisions of the Convention and periodically report to the (COP), the convention's open governing body conference of the Parties on the progress of implementation of UNCCD, including the NAPs.

Some important events:

Early '70s	Drought in sub-Saharan Africa - Over 200,000 people and millions of animals died
September 1973	Inter-State Permanent Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) established by 9 Sahelian countries



August - September 1977	United Nations Conference on Desertification (UNCOD) held in Nairobi, Kenya - Desertification addressed as a worldwide problem for the first time and a Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD) adopted
June 1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - The Earth Summit and Agenda 21 called on the UN General Assembly to set up an inter-governmental committee to prepare a legally binding instrument that addresses the problem of desertification
June 17, 1994	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) adopted in Paris, France
December 1996	The UNCCD entered into force, 90 days after the 50th ratification was received
October 1997	First Conference of Parties (COP1) in Rome, Italy - Rules governing the COP and its subsidiary bodies established, the functions of the Global Mechanism (GM) set forth and the permanent secretariat designated
December 1998	COP2 in Senegal, Dakar - Consultations on the medium-term strategy of the secretariat. Declaration of the first round table of Members of Parliaments on desertification
January 1999	Permanent secretariat of the UNCCD established in Bonn, Germany
November 1999	COP3 in Recife, Brazil. "Recife Initiative" on commitments to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD launched.
December 2000	COP4 in Bonn, Germany - Implementation annex for Central and Eastern Europe (Annex V) adopted and the "Declaration on the commitments under the Convention", as follow up to the "Recife Initiative" approved.
March - April 2001	Intersessional meeting of the ad hoc working group (AHWG) in Bonn, Germany. Building on a review of national and other reports, a comprehensive report on further steps in the implementation of the Convention was adopted and submitted to COP5
October 2001	COP5 in Geneva, Switzerland - Committee on Review of Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) established as a subsidiary body of the COP. Reform of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) is adopted and a Group of Experts was established
August - September 2002	World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, South Africa - Governments call on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to become a financial mechanism of the UNCCD
October 2002	Second Assembly of the GEF in Beijing, China, adopts a decision to designate land degradation as its fifth focal area and to establish the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD



November 2002	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC1) in Rome, Italy - Innovative solutions to combat desertification were identified and shared.
August - September 2003	COP 6 in Havana, Cuba - The Global Environment Facility (GEF) designated as a financial mechanism of the Convention; CRIC2 recommendations on ways to improve the implementation of the Convention endorsed
May 2005	CRIC3 in Bonn, Germany. New ways mapped to mainstream desertification.
September 2007	COP8, CST 8 and CRIC6 were held in Madrid, Spain. Country Parties adopted the ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008-2018, the Strategy). This new development has taken the Convention to new ground. Most importantly, Parties laid out a clear vision for a period of ten years in The Strategy, which was to forge global partnerships to reverse and prevent desertification and land degradation. These partnerships were also meant to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas. Coupled with the vision was a Strategy mission: To provide a global framework to support the development and implementation of national and regional policies that are to contribute to the reduction of poverty.
September 2009	First UNCCD scientific conference was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on the theme "Bio-physical and socio-economic monitoring and assessment of desertification and land degradation, to support decision-making in land and water management".
February 2011	CST S-2 and CRIC 9 were held in Bonn, Germany. First review of performance towards the operational objectives of the Strategy was carried out. CST continued the development of impact indicators.
September 2011	United Nations General Assembly high level meeting on desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) brought together world leaders to debate on the importance of addressing DLDD for sustainable development and poverty eradication.
October 2011	COP 10, CST 10 and CRIC 10 were held in Changwon, Republic of Korea, with largest-ever number of participants. Parties agreed on tools for the first UNCCD impact monitoring and continued the institutional reform. Several partnerships addressing land degradation from different aspects, including the "Changwon Initiative", were launched.
September 2013	COP 11, Windhoek, Namibia.

The UNCCD and Bangladesh Context

Having experienced this situation, Bangladesh signed the Convention in 1994 and ratified it in 1996. The total precipitation in drier areas, for example the climate of the western and north-western parts of Bangladesh is characterized by low participation with erratic rainfall. Annual rainfall is about 1200mm which is quite low compared to other parts of the country. In those areas evapotranspiration exceeds the amount of rainfall in the dry season. Bangladesh experienced 20 severe



droughts between 1960 and 2000 extended over a region of 5.46 Mha (NCSA, 2007). The area affected by severe droughts will increase under severe climatic change scenario and this will lead to more water consumption either from surface or ground water abstraction.

Actions Undertaken

- Drafted National Action Program (NAP) in 2005.
- Conducted National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) in 2007.
- Bangladesh Capacity Development Action Plan (NCSA) 2007.
- Established Network of Focal Points/Alternative Focal Points among relevant GOs/NGOs to account implementation of Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD) related activities.
- Implemented "Capacity Building and Resource Mobilization for Sustainable Land Management" project during 2008-2011.
- Submitted sixth national report in July 2014.

In addition to those, the Department of Environment is implementing "Bangladesh: Revision and Alignment of National Action Program (NAP) with UNCCD 10-Year Strategic Plan and Framework" project.

Background of the Project

The UNCCD formulated 10-year Strategy (2008-2018) under decision 3/COP 8. Later on the Conference of Parties (COP) decided (decision 2/COP 9) to align NAP with the Strategy for enhancing implementation of the Convention. To implement the decision, the GEF allocated 150,000 USD for each country for formulation and/or alignment of NAP and to meet reporting requirement of the Convention.

To address DLDD issues under current climate change scenario, it was necessary to formulate NAP aligned with the UNCCD 10-year Strategy. Further to meet reporting obligation, a project proposal was submitted to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) secretariat to get funding through Direct Access method. After necessary verification and evaluation, the GEF approved the project.

Objectives of the project

1. Formulation of NAP aligned with UNCCD 10-year Strategy.
2. Preparation of 5th and 6th National reports on implementation of the Convention.

References

1. Bangladesh Capacity Development Action Plan (NCSA) 2007.
2. Technical Project Proposal (TPP) of "Bangladesh: Revision and Alignment of National Action Program (NAP) with UNCCD 10-Year Strategic Plan and Framework"
3. www.unccd.int