

Why **SoLARid** ?



Contacts:

Youssef Brahimi
Coordinator, South-to-south Cooperation
ybrahimi@ifad.org

Inès Chaâlala
Advisor, South-to-south Cooperation
i.chaalala@ifad.org

www.global-mechanism.org

Why SolArid?

South-to-south cooperation takes place in a global context in which the principles and methods of development financing are currently being reviewed. Profound changes are being made to resource allocation procedures, recognizing that partner countries must be in charge of their development policies and strategies and coordinate actions in support of development (Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, 2005).

SolArid, the Global Mechanism (GM)'s South-to-south cooperation programme, addresses combating desertification as an integral part of the socio-economic, political and cultural development of countries affected by drought and desertification.

SolArid works to change attitudes and perceptions. It aims to make resource mobilization for United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) implementations more effective. It targets the most affected countries of the Sahel and the Sahara.

Overcoming conventional institutional approaches

Despite provisions that make it accessible to all stakeholders, Convention implementation has been overly institutional and even sectoral at the national level.

SolArid offers a flexible, multidimensional platform for knowledge-sharing between stakeholders with different views, and encourages research into fundamental - albeit sensitive - cross-cutting issues (such as decentralization, migration and gender). In so doing, it aims to generate direct solidarity between UNCCD stakeholders in the Maghreb and the Sahel, based on the principles of diversity and complementarity.

SolArid's vision is a non-linear process that offers increasing opportunities for capacity-building and resource mobilization. Creating an enabling environment that encompasses human, financial, information resource and policy issues, is essential for securing and increasing the allocation of financial resources for sustainable land management (SLM).

Founding countries

SolArid currently brings together the peri-Saharan countries of Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Tunisia. It welcomes the involvement of other interested countries in the region.

Stakeholders

One of the founding principles of SolArid is to involve a broad range of stakeholders: national governments and institutions, local elected officials and civil society. Their differing views and perceptions enrich the resource mobilization process. Any initiative undertaken within the framework of SolArid brings together these decision-makers, as development partners.

Resource mobilization and integration

Above all, SolArid aims to mobilize resources in the South for the South, and promotes 'triangular' cooperation. It encourages the involvement of key stakeholders - for instance, local communities - as the building blocks of good governance.

In practice, SolArid relies on human and technical resources from North and West Africa and draws upon a wealth of experiences in both regions, as the basis for its capacity-building programmes. In so doing, SolArid complements the GM's country programmes, addressing strategic issues that bridge regions.

Knowledge management

Sharing experiences

An electronic forum moderated by the GM has been launched, to build and share knowledge. SolArid members have identified 'hot topics' with a view to exchanging experiences. Topics include:

- decentralization and natural resource management: **Mali's** experience;
- integrated rural development and local natural resource management: **Morocco's** experience;
- building anti-desertification measures into national economic and social development planning: **Tunisia's** experience; and
- synergies between the environmental conventions: **Niger's** experience.

Capacity-building for resource mobilization

Under the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Programme, the GM provides training in Developing Integrated Financing Strategies to Combat Desertification (DIFS). The first training session was held in Tunis, Tunisia, in September 2006 for the North African countries of Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia. The training course has now been incorporated into the SolArid programme. Other training courses will be organized for West and Central Africa, building on the skills acquired in North Africa.

Investing in strategic areas

Through its programme activities, SolArid highlights aspects of common concern, specific to combating desertification and poverty in the Sahel and the Sahara. It encourages development partners to pay special attention to the countries in this region.

Decentralization: the importance of sustainable natural resource management

The first international SolArid workshop, *Decentralization and local development in arid zones: In search of synergy and solidarity*, was held in Marrakech, Morocco, from 13 to 16 April 2006. By choosing the specific theme of decentralization that is central to combating desertification, the workshop set the stage for exploring two of the key objectives of SolArid:

- the creation of a regional forum to exchange experiences and promote solidarity for local development; and
- the promotion of knowledge-sharing between Maghrebian and Sahelian stakeholders on the importance of sustainable land management at the local level and in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The workshop's concluding recommendations have guided all SolArid's subsequent work: decentralization and decentralized cooperation have become central themes, and local communities are systematically invited to participate in programme activities.

More specifically, SolArid aims to:

- promote decentralized triangular cooperation to mobilize resources;
- capacity-build in the framework of South-to-south cooperation between the Maghreb and the countries of the Southern Sahel, especially to develop projects and programmes; and
- encourage direct technical cooperation between local communities in the countries of the South, using the opportunities provided by the UNCCD.

Desertification, poverty and migration: the links

The Sahel-Saharan region is a primary source of migration towards the North and at the same time, an important transit zone. The Maghreb is also a migration destination. Migration has many causes. For the UNCCD, it is important to understand more about the nexus between desertification, poverty and migration, the impact of global trends on local and international mobility, and on new migration in the region.

Migration began in the Saharan regions, where it continues to be strong. It is now spreading towards the metropolitan areas along the coast of the northern Maghreb, where it fuels economies and emphasizes territorial boundaries.

It is also important to understand how these flows are structured and organized, their physical impact on regional and urban areas – especially oasis towns – how they affect the relationship between oasis towns and urban areas, and to what extent.

These aspects were addressed at the international workshop, *The cost of inaction and opportunities for investment in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas* (Rome, 4 and 5 December 2006), which highlighted the social costs of desertification and that the concept of migration is not properly defined. This must be done before proposing any type of common solution.

The links between desertification, poverty and migration within the Sahel-Saharan region, are being explored through a SolArid project. Three complementary objectives have been identified:

- assessment of the role played by land degradation in migration within the Sahel-Saharan region;
- contribution to increasing the understanding of migratory flows, the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the phenomenon and its impact on the countries' economies, including the contribution migrants make to the local development of their places of origin; and
- development of strong arguments on the need to invest in novel ways – for instance through public-private partnerships – in SLM in arid areas, in response to migration caused by poverty.

Such arguments can be used with national decision-makers and development partners in the North, in particular the European Union.

An inventory of the knowledge currently available on the subject is being conducted, using a multi-disciplinary approach. This will serve as the basis for an international workshop that the GM will organize in late December 2007.

The oasis system: conservation and development

An oasis system is:

- a highly complex production system, associating multiple plant and animal species (high biological diversity);
- a rural environment originally oriented towards self-sufficiency in food production, later becoming integrated into the market economy;
- a completely and irreversibly sedentary urban environment; and
- a place for trade, particularly where caravan routes converge.

The oasis system in the peri-Saharan region, the Sahara itself, the arid zones of North Africa and the Sahel, is an age-old, intensive system, managed by sedentary populations. It has benefited from the techniques and technologies of other systems.

The oasis system is highly vulnerable to ecological and socio-economic stresses, which threaten its existence. At the request of member countries, SolArid has undertaken a study on the impact of development efforts on the functioning and sustainability of the oasis system. In the context of globalization, it seeks a compromise between conservation on the one hand, and integration with the market economy on the other. This study, conducted in partnership with specialized institutions, gives priority to:

- migration;
- isolation;
- urbanization; and
- tourism and its socio-economic and cultural impacts.

The findings will be presented and discussed at an international workshop planned by the GM for the first half of 2008. One of the expected results is a handbook to enable decision-makers and investors to assess the best options for combating desertification and to maximize synergies with measures to combat climate change and, in particular, to prevent loss of biodiversity.

Promoting initiatives

The Tchém'sou Coalition: Strengthening women's capacity to invest

Promoting women's role in decision-making processes in Francophone Africa in the context of the UNCCD, is an initiative that responds to a request by women parliamentarians and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) representatives from several Francophone African countries. It stems from an awareness of the need to support economic and social activities undertaken by women to combat desertification.

The GM responded favourably to this request by co-organizing with the Ministry of Environment and Sanitation of Mali, an international workshop, ***Empowering women to invest in sustainable land management*** (Bamako, Mali, 5-7 June 2007).

The workshop brought together national and international NGOs, representatives of ministries responsible for the UNCCD (agriculture and environment), sub-regional and international organizations, and development partners, to:

- develop a common vision of women's institutional, socio-economic and political challenges and achievements, at community level;
- define a concerted approach to building multi-stakeholder partnerships to enhance networking capacity among women for lobbying purposes; and
- determine a framework for GM action to increase women's capacity to invest in sustainable land management.

The participants went beyond adopting a short-term operational plan, and decided to set up the Tchém'sou Coalition. The Coalition is a platform for lobbying and exchanging information and experiences, and for forging financial partnerships to support women's networks that are active in managing natural resources in North, West and Central Africa.

The LAMA initiative

Latin America-Maghreb (LAMA) initiative was launched in Buenos Aires in March 2007, on the margins of the 5th Session of the Committee for the Review of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CRIC 5). LAMA follows the Joint Declaration by Environment Ministers from the Arab Countries and Latin America on Environmental Cooperation (Nairobi, February 2007). Bringing together Latin American and Maghreb countries in the first instance, LAMA will address anti-desertification issues while ensuring synergies with the other environmental conventions. The major thrusts for cooperation are:

- capacity-building, technical cooperation and technology transfer;
- integrated water resource management;
- evaluation of the impact of climate change on the environment;
- the role of civil society in natural resource management in arid areas and benchmarks and indicators.

Developing strategic alliances

DEFI: Implementing the UNCCD in the Mediterranean region - a partnership between the Governments of Spain, France, Italy and the GM

Spain, France and Italy, as Parties to the UNCCD, actively support affected countries in implementing their action programmes to combat desertification. They provide specific support to the countries of North Africa because of their geographical and historical links, as well as using existing bilateral or European cooperation frameworks.

The GM has been active in the region for several years. The objective of the DEFI Partnership is therefore to consolidate cooperation between the GM and the three Mediterranean countries, to establish an overall framework for joint initiatives and to strengthen synergies.

DEFI member countries support SolArid's activities by:

- facilitating access to decentralized cooperation channels; identifying and involving northern Mediterranean expertise as required; and facilitating information exchange and technology transfer;
- supporting relevant activities within a partnership programme; and
- promoting the involvement of other partners from the North.

Spain, for example, has already made a substantial financial contribution to SolArid for oasis ecosystem activities.

Cooperation with CEN-SAD: a South-to-south and multi-donor partnership platform for resource mobilization

On the margins of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the GM's Managing Director and CEN-SAD's Secretary General signed a framework agreement for cooperation and partnership in pursuit of their common objectives of promoting the establishment of an African forum for cooperation and sustainable development.

Priority was given to establishing a South-to-south, multi-donor partnership platform for resource mobilization and to increasing South-to-south cooperation through consolidated anti-desertification measures, with a view to enhancing regional integration.

In the short term, cooperation between the GM and CEN-SAD aims to:

- establish a South-to-south, multi-donor partnership platform to mobilize financing, drawing upon the GM's experience in partnership-building;
- build capacity among CEN-SAD member countries, through South-to-south cooperation in particular, on combating desertification by developing and implementing integrated national financing strategies; and
- support CEN-SAD member countries in combating desertification through their national development strategies.

Inter-regional cooperation between Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific

The GM is preparing a project financed by the European Commission to promote synergies between the environmental conventions. On the specific issue of combating desertification, the GM proposes to expand and adapt the SolArid concept to other parts of the world and to promote knowledge sharing between Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands. This project, scheduled to commence in 2008, is financed by the European Development Fund (EDF).