

West & Central Africa Programme

Focusing on interventions that take the regions' diverse needs into account

Where?

This vast region of 26 countries contains two distinct types of ecosystem: the Sahel in the north of West Africa and the South of Central Africa, where desertification jeopardizes poverty alleviation, and the progressively relatively humid coastal zones in between, where the effects of desertification are fairly localized. The impact of desertification on poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) differs significantly between these two ecosystems, as do the resources required to combat desertification.

What?

The GM has reviewed its intervention strategy to take these diverse realities into account. The overall objective of the programme is to establish an operational strategy that will lead to the flow of financial resources for implementing the UNCCD in the context of countries' Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) and achieving the MDGs.

The GM works alongside governments and other key stakeholders to develop, mobilize resources for and implement integrated National Financing Strategies (NFSs) to tackle the problems surrounding the degradation of natural resources.

This process involves providing financial and/or technical support for activities such as stocktaking, capacity-building, awareness-raising and mainstreaming UNCCD concerns into national development frameworks.

Why?

- so key stakeholders in UNCCD implementation master the techniques they need to mobilize resources for sustainable land management (SLM)
- to increase country ownership of development processes in general, and resource mobilization processes in particular, through the mainstreaming of UNCCD and SLM concerns into development frameworks
- to enhance resource mobilization, through the development and adoption of a NFS for each country

How?

At country level, the programme focuses on fostering specific pre-conditions for success:

- high-level political recognition that land degradation/desertification is a priority issue, and commitment to action because of its close link to poverty, particularly in the Sahel
- stakeholders' understanding that land degradation is a cross-cutting issue, so partnerships are crucial for SLM
- enabling policy and institutional incentives that encourage technical and financial partners, farmers, livestock producers and other actors to invest in combating land degradation.

At sub-regional level, the GM works in partnership with two inter-governmental organizations:

- the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) with the supervision of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), to mainstream the UNCCD into the Convergence Plan
- the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control (CILSS), through which and in collaboration with the Economic Committee of West African States (ECOWAS), it provides assistance to CILSS and ECOWAS member countries.

Special initiatives

Desertification Profile Development for the Francophone Countries of the Sahel

The overall objective of this initiative is to convince donors of the relevance of the Convention for achieving the MDGs and to upscale their financial support for UNCCD implementation in the Sahel, as a prerequisite for poverty alleviation. The initiative will map efforts to combat desertification in each country, focusing on success stories in agriculture and natural resources management. Guidelines will be produced for the implementation of best policies and practices, based on a long-term vision of development. The impacts of public and/or private investments on achievement of the MDGs - particularly MDG 1 - eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and MDG 7 - ensuring environmental sustainability - will be analysed in each case and the findings drawn upon as the basis for action.

Empowering Women to Implement the UNCCD

In the Beijing Statement, the First Conference on Women and Desertification (Beijing, China, May 2006) highlights the fundamental role that women play in managing natural resources, producing food, caring and educating their children and meeting other household needs in rural areas affected by desertification and drought. In performing these tasks – often in difficult conditions - women have gained extensive knowledge of natural resource management and are therefore key stakeholders in reversing desertification.

The GM women's initiative, which is being piloted in the Sahel, aims to:

- set up a platform for the exchange of experiences with a view to fostering knowledge management on how women contribute to natural resource management and SLM
- mobilize women opinion leaders from the South and the North to raise awareness about women's key roles in dryland areas and to give them more voice in decision-making processes
- explore the potential for increasing investment in sustainable development activities managed by women, and thus the financial flows for UNCCD implementation.

The first step will be a workshop to identify national, sub-regional and international partners and activities to be showcased to illustrate women's key role in UNCCD implementation.

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