



Concept Paper

Dialogue on establishing a Drought Management Centre in Central Asia in the Context of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Background:

In 2007, the Spanish Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) chose Land Degradation, Soil Contamination and Water Management as a theme for the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. The Secretariat of the UNCCD participated in the Forum process and its dialogue, which resulted in a confirmation of the importance of this theme for Central Asia. Following the Forum in Prague, the UNCCD and OSCE Secretariats decided to step up their efforts and enhance their co-operation in addressing common topical regional challenge, in particular, drought.

Since entering into force in 1996, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has been recognized as the only internationally legally binding instrument that has the term drought in the title and directly addresses the problem of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. The Convention serves as a critical instrument to its country Parties' efforts to reduce poverty and to achieve sustainable development with a view of reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). By placing particular importance on the participation of local communities in the decision-making and project implementation processes the Convention is implemented through National Action Programmes (NAPs), which can be complemented by Subregional (SRAPs) and Regional (RAPs) Action Programmes. At present, 191 countries and the European Union are Parties to the Convention.

All five Central Asian countries, namely, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are parties to the Convention and they fall under the UNCCD Regional implementation annex for Asia. Situated in the Caspian basin whose main landscapes are vast desert and semi-desert plains, piedmont plains and oases of irrigated soils, all five countries are affected by desertification and drought. In order to tackle the problem, all of them have adopted their NAPs in accordance with provisions of the Convention. They have also prepared a Subregional Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Central Asia (SRAP/CD) in which mitigation of the effects of drought is an important element.

Project Rationale:

In the past few decades, the economic and social impacts of desertification have been particularly severe in Central Asia.¹ Desertification and drought affect sustainable development through their interrelationships with important social and economic problems such as poverty, poor health and nutrition, lack of food security, and those arising from

¹ Adeel, Z, J. Bogardi and others, 2007. "Overcoming one of the greatest environmental challenges of our times: Re-thinking policies to cope with desertification", A policy brief based on the joint international conference: "Desertification and the international policy imperative" Algiers, Algeria, 17-19 December, 2006.

environmentally induced migration, displacement of persons and demographic dynamics. All these may have security implications as they may lead to tensions within and between countries. Drought mitigation and implementation of the objectives of the UNCCD need, not only national, but also a cross-border preparedness, since its impacts do not abide to national boundaries. The devastating consequences of drought are likely to worsen under the increase of climate change, and therefore, scientifically based cooperation should be promoted in order to address this challenge.

Based on a request to the UNCCD in October 2006, the project will provide a forum for the Central Asian countries to discuss the possible establishment of a Drought Management Centre in the Context of UNCCD. The initiative will be a cooperative effort of the UNCCD Secretariat, the OSCE, and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), drawing on the experience of the UNCCD secretariat in cooperation with the WMO in establishing a Drought Management Centre for South-eastern Europe (DMCSEE) in Slovenia. Establishment of a Centre would also enhance the implementation of UNCCD in the context of drought preparedness, monitoring and management, in particular in working out national as well as subregional drought strategies by bringing together relevant stakeholders. By providing a better network at national and among Central Asian countries while supplying necessary information to decision-makers, it is also expected that the Centre will contribute to the environmental security.

Objectives and activities:

The project will be supported by the OSCE through extra budgetary contributions. It aims to offer a platform for dialogue and bring together three essential groups of stakeholders on drought management and to discuss the possible establishment of a Drought Management Centre in Central Asia through (1) identifying the need and expectation for a Drought Management Centre in Central Asia; (2) preparing and adopting the Terms of Reference of the Centre; and (3) discussing further steps of the process toward the establishment and sustainability of the centre. Identified participants include UNCCD national focal points, representatives of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHS) and experts on drought from the scientific community.

Two meetings are proposed in order to formulate the Terms of Reference of a Drought Management Centre as well as to obtain consensus of all participating countries on further steps to be taken. The first meeting will bring together all stakeholders and will provide a technical forum to identify the needs, expectations and objectives of a Centre. The second meeting will provide a political platform to discuss the possible establishment of a Drought Management Centre in Central Asia and further steps to be taken.

Expected Outcomes:

1. Political commitment by Central Asian countries in the establishment of a Drought Management Centre in Central Asia
2. ToRs developed and agreed upon in order to establish a Drought Management Centre in Central Asia