

ENID POSITION PAPER ON THE IIWG 10 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

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The European Networking Initiative on Desertification (eniD) was created in June 2001 by European NGOs involved in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). At the moment this working group counts six organisations and networks, which are operational in the field of sustainable development in drylands: AG Desertifikation, Germany; Both ENDS, the Netherlands; CARI, France; Dodo, Finland; Drylands Coordination Group (DCG), Norway; Ricerca e Cooperazione, Italy.

DCG – Norway, info@drylands-group.org, www.drylands-group.org

CARI - France, cariassociation@yahoo.fr, www.cariassociation.org, www.desertif-actions.org

LPPS - Germany, gorik@t.online.de, www.forum-ue.de

Dodo - Finland, aavikko@dodo.org, www.dodo.org

FIPA - International, nora.ourabah@ifap.org, www.ifap.org

Both ENDS - The Netherlands, dm@bothends.org, www.bothends.org, www.dry-net.org

RC - Italy, www.ongrc.org

Contact in Madrid during COP 8: only from 01/09/2007 to 15/09/2007 - Patrice BURGER + 34 652582171

THE TEXT OF THE UNCCD CALLS FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE OPERATIONAL MECHANISMS AIMED AT HARMONISING APPROACHES TO COMBAT LAND DEGRADATION¹. THIS ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IS ESSENTIAL IF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IS TO BE REACHED IN DRYLAND AREAS. HOWEVER, IT IS BY FAR NOT SUFFICIENT. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ALSO HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY ON THE POLICY LEVEL BOTH NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. THIS IS WHY ENID HAS DECIDED TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS TO THE DRAFT 10 YEAR STRATEGY FOR THE CONVENTION. THIS PAPER THUS SUMMARIZES OUR COMMENTS AND MAKES CLEAR AND CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS TO BE DISCUSSED UNDER THIS COP.

¹ This is enshrined amongst other things in articles 3, 9 10 and 14 of the Convention text, as well as having been confirmed on numerous occasions by amongst others erstwhile Secretary General Kofi Annan.

1. REACTION TO THE SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS PAPER OF THE IIWG

In the Situational Analysis that accompanies the Strategic Plan, participation only involves NGOs, and not the wider civil society constituency.

Furthermore, the Analysis repeatedly refers to the participatory approach embedded in the UNCCD. However, in reality, this analysis is too positive and unrealistic. In practice genuine participation both at international and national levels depends on the goodwill of a few Parties rather than a commitment of many.

In the Situational Analysis, it is recognised that the degree of actual participation is sub-optimal². There is a disjuncture between policy and action in the sense that on the one hand, there appears to be a declining motivation of CSOs to participate in the international and national UNCCD processes, while on the other hand one may observe a high number of CSOs actually implementing the UNCCD objectives without necessarily linking their activities to the UNCCD. There is an enormous body of local experiences and practices available, but not through the UNCCD processes. Let us now analyse the main reasons for this discrepancy.

A. Main obstacles for qualitative participation from within the CSO sector

The Situational Analysis indicates that the UNCCD suffers from limited engagement from among others NGO constituencies. On top of that, the quality of CSO participation in the most recent COPs and CRICs has been judged by various stakeholders to have been of low quality, it has not contributed enough to the policy discussions and decision-making processes. The CSOs themselves can be held accountable for part of the reasons behind the above statements.

The most prevailing points for improvement are:

- Lack of interest and motivation to participate in this particular Convention because of misunderstanding of the word 'desertification' and erroneous interpretation of the Convention and its purpose – many organisations do not consider their work in drylands relevant for the Convention;
- Many CSOs do not consider the UNCCD as an effective tool to improve dryland situations because of its failing implementation at local level;
- Lack of capacities of CSOs to organise themselves in effective participation processes, and at the same time training people locally to get organised is less attractive for donors to support than for example tree-planting projects;
- Lack of knowledge on UNCCD procedures and potentials;
- Lack of a pro-active approach by certain CSOs participating in UNCCD processes and lack of preparedness to really bring an added value to the meetings.

Several CSOs are willing to address these shortcomings as expressed during the Civil Society and Desertification Forum in Montpellier in 2006 and through their engagement in the project Drynet that was started at the beginning of 2007³.

² The Analysis states that "the insufficient empowerment of local communities and the presence of perverse economic and policy incentives continue to act as barriers to implementation of UNCCD-related strategies, programmes and measures".

³ Drynet is an EC-supported initiative from 14 CSOs worldwide building capacities among CSOs and their networks with regard to influencing national policy agendas in favour of dryland communities, and using success stories from drylands as inspiration for innovative projects.

B. Main obstacles to qualitative participation from outside the CSO sector

At the international level:

- The selection procedure by the Secretariat for sponsorship of the participation of CSOs at COPs and CRICs is inappropriate – it is not transparent, the criteria are not public and some CSOs that receive sponsoring lack a pro-active approach;
- It is difficult for CSOs to find funds to participate in COPs and CRICs;
- Participation at the international level is not connected to participation at the national level;
- CSOs do not have access to certain negotiation and drafting processes unless they are in their countries' official delegation, something that is not possible for every country. **Therefore, important decisions have been taken before CSOs could have become aware of them.** The level of participation in decision-making at COPs and CRICs depends on the goodwill and initiative of certain individuals to provide CSOs with information and consult them on their positions;
- At the COPs and CRICs, CSOs do not have enough means and support to facilitate their policy-influencing processes;
- The UNCCD website does not provide the relevant information in time, and therefore CSOs depend on their national Focal Point or their networks to provide them with such information;
- There is an absence of critical debate and substance at COPs and CRICs, in particular in relation to policy orientations, relevant for CSOs working at the local and national level in drylands;
- In practice, only NGOs are considered as civil society in the selection of COP participants, thereby excluding the large group of other stakeholders from the COP and CRIC negotiations, such as farmer groups or the private sector for example.

At the national level:

- The legal status of CSOs is often not acknowledged by their government;
- The government and other stakeholders are not aware of CSOs and their activities and therefore do not seek partnerships with them;
- Top-down designs of projects and programmes fail to include relevant experience and knowledge from the local level;
- Lack of financial support for CSOs in participatory processes at local and national levels leads to CSOs having to pay themselves for sharing their knowledge and expertise;
- Lack of recognition of the relevance and importance of the work performed by CSOs for UNCCD implementation;
- Lack of a structural/formal procedure, shared obligations and responsibilities, as well as a clear and official role for CSOs.

At both levels, there is a vicious circle whereby poor information leads to weak contributions by civil society actors at UNCCD events leading to a reduction in funding support for these actors which further limits their participation.

2. REACTION TO THE FINAL STRATEGIC PLAN AND FRAMEWORK

Comments related to the involvement of civil society in the implementation of the UNCCD:

- **The SP does not sufficiently reflect the final aim of servicing the land users in drylands.**
- **The current SP lacks a more firm rooting in the relationship between national and international UNCCD processes**, including participatory processes (e.g. capacity building, facilitation of participation, financial implications).
- **It is an illusion at this moment to believe that a single CSO network exists which represents all CSO interests adequately.** All proposals and processes regarding CSO participation should depart from that acknowledgement.

- **The objective for the Parties and other stakeholders in the coming years should be the implementation of the UNCCD itself rather than the SP.** The overwhelming focus on structures and procedures has been the main criticism towards the UNCCD from several stakeholders and donors, and there is a **risk of getting drowned in procedures and processes** again instead of focussing on content, people and implementation policies.
- **No clear link is made between the discussion on finances and the discussion on commitments and responsibilities of the different stakeholders and donors, primarily the Parties.**
- **There is no timeframe** given for the actions that should be undertaken by the different stakeholders, thereby creating the risk that the process will take too long and impatient stakeholders will turn their back to the UNCCD.

In the section of the SP called “Implementation Framework”, in which the roles and responsibilities of the various UNCCD institutions, partners and stakeholders in meeting the objectives of the SP are outlined, the Parties are not recognised as such, other than a brief line stating that the Parties have a lead role in delivering all the objectives and outcomes of the SP. The Parties are not attributed any specific responsibilities or commitments. However, for a sound civil society participatory process in the UNCCD, commitments and responsibilities of the Parties are essential.

CSOs are not mentioned at all in this section. They do not have a role, a mandate, or any responsibilities, and there are no suggestions for improved institutional and procedural arrangements regarding their function and participation in the process of UNCCD implementation.

As for the roles and responsibilities mentioned for the various institutions and bodies, a few reactions are:

- **CST:** CSOs should have a role in determining the focused work programme of the CST based on their experience with knowledge gaps hampering sustainable land management at the local level;
- **CRIC:** The CRIC needs to become a valuable evaluation tool. There is a lack of suggestions for a renewed set-up of CRIC including a space for lessons learned with clear and applicable recommendations and a scientific review on where we stand globally on desertification at the beginning of each CRIC. Also, **CSOs could play a large role particularly in the CRIC process.** They can both give feedback on the implementation status of the UNCCD as well as provide the CRIC with successful local examples.
- **Secretariat:** The Secretariat should have a similar facilitating role for CSOs as it has for Parties and subsidiary bodies of the Convention, along with a role in awareness raising and supporting civil society causes, urging Parties and other stakeholders to take participation processes seriously.
- **Secretariat/GM coordination:** The roles of these two bodies in terms of facilitating CSO participation at national and international levels need to be well divided but also well-coordinated in order to be most effective.

3. CONCRETE ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS FROM THE CSO PERSPECTIVE

Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of CSOs in the UNCCD processes

There is a need for the Parties to agree on a more formal status of CSOs in the UNCCD meetings and related activities. Such mandates need to be formalised in a document prepared by a number of CSOs from different geographical regions, the NGO liaison officer of the Secretariat, the GM and a few committed Parties.

- It should be defined which COP negotiation sessions CSOs will have access to, not just as an observer but as a full negotiating stakeholder.
- The formal role of CSOs in relation to the CRIC and CST processes and sessions should be defined, including possibilities for CSOs to share experiences on traditional knowledge, scientific research needed in the field, success stories and lessons learned. This role should also include the task to take part in rethinking CRIC and CST procedures and set-up, and reporting.

Together with defining the role and accompanying responsibilities of the CSO participants, clear decisions should be taken on commitments and arrangements by the Parties in order to make such a partnership possible:

- Each Party should commit to make an effort to support and welcome participation of CSOs; All Parties are made responsible to inform themselves about relevant CSOs and their work in their own countries;
- Donor countries should make an effort to sufficiently explore the options for supporting the crucial participatory processes on the national, and – where applicable – the regional and the international level through their bilateral and regional development cooperation. They should also make an effort to support innovative projects and programmes, and capacity building activities;
- Affected country Parties should be obliged to design an adequate mechanism for participation at the national and local level together with CSOs, along with a funding mechanism.
- Each Focal Point should be made responsible to inform CSOs in their country about relevant national and international processes in a timely manner; this role should also be played by at the international level;
- All Parties should make an effort to include CSOs in projects, programmes and partnerships; they should engage CSOs in long-term dialogues to enable mutual learning;
- All Parties should take into account the time and costs of participation; Capacity building of both CSOs and Parties is needed for all this to be possible.

Improved cooperation between CSOs and the UNCCD Secretariat and GM

There should be a clear division of capacity building tasks between the Secretariat and the GM. The institutional framework and technical capacity of the UNCCD secretariat should allow for its facilitating role. We would like to emphasize the role of the Secretariat in awareness raising among the general public in developed countries as well. We suggest the following:

- The Secretariat should confine itself to its facilitating role, which should be similar for both Parties and CSOs. Selection of participants should be finalised by the Secretariat in consultation with a CSO and a Party from each continent, to be assigned on a rotating basis, four months before the COP or CRIC session is to take place, on the basis of transparent criteria;
- These criteria should be written by a small task force of Parties, CSOs, the Secretariat and GM, **during or right after COP8**, and should be open for consultation and revision for at least several months; The GM will work out a strategy to finance CSO participation in COPs and CRICs; their proposal for financing will be open for consultation for several months before it is fixed, well in time before the session following COP8;
- The Secretariat will provide timely information on the sessions, participation procedures and documents under negotiation through their website and an email list that is updated regularly, with a special effort towards including the actors that are far from the decision-making centres;
- The Secretariat will also facilitate CSO networking and information sharing at the international level, by hosting an interactive section on their website. Parties and other stakeholders can thus also be better informed on CSOs and their activities, which will encourage partnerships;
- The GM will include CSO participation in their information and advisory services to the Parties regarding financing sustainable land management actions. GM will make an effort to investigate with relevant stakeholders per country on potential mechanisms for financing local level activities and organisations. Possibilities such as a national desertification/environment fund or small grants facilities will be investigated;
- The supporting role of the GM to CSOs in fundraising is critical. Therefore, GM has to continue these capacity building activities towards CSOs;
- The Secretariat will facilitate CSO participation to sessions in a similar way as it facilitates participation of the Parties; it will make an effort to provide CSOs with adequate means during the sessions. The funds needed for these means will come from the budget for CSO participation arrangements;
- The Secretariat's NGO liaison officer is the first person within the Secretariat responsible to oversee the above activities, and will have a clearly defined role with enough space/flexibility to play that role;

- GM will continue its capacity building activities regarding knowledge on national budgeting, donor coordination and funding strategies for CSOs. The Secretariat will focus on strengthening the capacities of civil society on the content and the procedures of the UNCCD.

Criteria for selecting CSOs to participate at COPs and CRICs!

It is the responsibility of the CSO sector to guarantee qualitative CSO participation as much as is in their power, and to organise themselves at national and international levels. By engaging in the UNCCD participatory processes, they commit themselves to adopting a pro-active attitude, aiming to contribute to the UNCCD processes in a meaningful way.

Participation should start at the local and national level, feeding into the international level processes. In other words, CSOs participating in the international sessions can only do so if they are also actively involved at local and national level UNCCD implementation activities and negotiations. National stakeholders such as the UNCCD focal point and other CSOs should be able to judge whether a CSO that wants to take part in a COP or CRIC is actually rooted in relevant local-level activities.

CSOs are themselves responsible for designing legitimate and representative coordinating mechanisms at national and international levels. It is important that CSOs know what is expected from them at local, national and international levels, in order to know whether they can deliver and whether they need to work on building capacities.

CSOs have the responsibility to maintain contact with their UNCCD focal point, to keep themselves informed through the UNCCD improved website, to engage in relevant discussions and negotiations, to actively seek partnerships and to spread information on local success stories and lessons learned. They shall enhance their capacity on negotiation skills and increase their understanding of national and global policies and existing scientific knowledge.

Selection criteria for CSO participation in COPs and CRICs should be based on the responsibilities and tasks CSOs perform at the national level, and possibly on their credibility at the international level. The first upcoming COP session should adopt the criteria officially, although they must be used in a final draft form before. Issues such as diverse representation of interest groups, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in local level activities, newcomer to the process or not, and a geographical balance should be taken into account in the criteria. An evaluation mechanism should be incorporated, through which participation can be evaluated.

CSOs will monitor the participatory process in their countries and collectively at the international level.

4. URGENCY TO ACT AND MAKE CHANGES NOW!

In 2006 we celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the UNCCD. Though much has happened and the attention has been focussed on drylands on many important occasions, the current situation in drylands has globally not improved as much as we would like. Also, complaints are heard by all stakeholders that the actual implementation of the UNCCD is not happening as it should.

We fear that if this COP8 session does not take the needed decisions on reforms and changes needed, the risk will be that many Parties and other stakeholders will lose their interest in the UNCCD because of its lack of functioning as a useful tool to combat land degradation and improve sustainable land management in drylands. Therefore, this COP8 session is a turning point with regard to the future of the Convention! It requires decisions that are far-reaching and bring about real changes, real improvements! Not marginal little shifts and adaptations, but daring decisions giving the UNCCD a true new course.

WE THEREFORE URGE THE PARTIES AT COP8 TO TAKE ACTION AND MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!