



DESERTLINKS

**COMBATING DESERTIFICATION IN MEDITERRANEAN EUROPE
LINKING SCIENCE WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

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HOW DESERTLINKS MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO THE WORK OF THE UNCCD ANNEXES

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1. Introduction

Aim and Opportunities

The purpose of this deliverable is to assess how DESERTLINKS and DIS4ME could contribute to the work of the other UNCCD Annexes. The UNCCD is a very large organisation with complex programmes and activities that are continually evolving. Information about the Action Programmes for the different countries can be found in the reports presented at the UNCCD Conference Of the Parties and other meetings as well as in the National Action Programmes that are posted on the UNCCD website. Information can also be found on the home pages of the National UNCCD programmes. A superficial scan through a large number of available NAP's would suggest that these are in varying degrees of development and implementation. In particular this varies with the length of time since starting, with the amount of resources either available or able to be committed, with the organisational and institutional arrangements made to incorporate desertification beneficial policies into other policies. It also reflects the political interest in Desertification.

According to these different levels of NAP development and complexity, DIS4ME and DESERTLINKS have a different potential values. At one extreme, where NAPS are well underway and there is a large data resource, there is the opportunity to develop and apply a Desertification Indicator and Information System tool like DIS4ME in these countries or regions. Examples of where this is the case could be for example South Africa, Indonesia, Mexico and China. All of these countries are trying to put into effect a clear vision that they have concerning how desertification should be tackled. On the other hand, where it is clear from the NAP that things are less advanced and that there is not so much local capacity available DIS4ME could be used as a capacity building tool. Related to this is another very relevant need and this concerns the GEF which is the instrument being used to finance many of the action plans in poor countries.

The GEF operations plan for combating land degradation has been developed taking into account modern concepts and paradigms regarding interactions between societies and environments and natural resource management. Many of the people responsible for combating desertification have far less experience and understanding than the GEF consultants who prescribe the types of actions that propose funding. DIS4ME would be an ideal tool for raising the awareness and demonstrating the broader issues and principles of combating desertification. Raising the understanding of desertification processes and sustainable land management in the context of desertification would give people confidence in their ability to make decisions.

Finally, DIS4ME could be used as a basic Desertification Information Resource. Within this information can be found regarding indicator methodologies

The following are discussed in this report:

- What DIS4ME is and what it has to offer.
- The GEF and DESERTLINKS.
- The COP Benchmark and Indicator Report.
- Regional Priorities in Africa.
- Contribution to National Action plans
- Conclusions and Recommendations

2. What DESERTLINKS is and what DIS4ME has to offer

“DIS4ME has become a Knowledge Base on Desertification as well as an Expert system on Desertification Indicators for Europe”

When the title of this deliverable was proposed four years ago, the DESERTLINKS Indicator System was conceived as a project that would demonstrate how the vision of the UNCCD requirements for indicators put forward at COP 1 could be developed from the results and knowledge of past EU Desertification Research projects in several of the Annex Four countries. It would involve interactions between the Focal Points, stakeholders and the scientific community in order to help develop the link between science and community actions. What DESERTLINKS intended to offer would be an indicator system that matched the requirements that would emerge from the needs identified during the study.

Against this background, the objective of this deliverable would then have been to show how this could be of use in other Annexes. However, a visit to the DIS4ME web site will show something that goes far beyond what was originally intended and thought possible. DIS4ME can be thought of as both a Desertification Knowledge Base and an interactive expert system that helps the enquirer to increase their understanding of the causes and concerns about the main desertification issues specifically for Europe, but it is linked also to the rest of the world.

Much of the reported literature on desertification indicators is descriptive and is in the form of proposals and suggestions for candidate indicators. It is abstract. DESERTLINKS goes far beyond this because it describes and evaluates operational procedures for measuring and calculating indicators and provides tools for combining and using them. It is operational.

DESERTLINKS clearly explains the different indicator frameworks that have been and are being used by various organisations and moreover allows many of these to be applied. Instead of just being a catalogue of indicator descriptions, in most cases DIS4ME enables the enquirer to establish if desertification is taking place or if there is a risk. In most cases, some help is implicitly given in helping in finding solutions. It also contains tools that enables the user to combine information provided by different parameters into desertification indices.

DESERTLINKS then should not be thought of as simply a source of indicators for those needing them. It is rather an Interactive Desertification Information system that is a potential resource and self training tool. It provides an important documentation of the nature and extent of ongoing desertification in Europe and can be used for capacity building throughout the world.

2. The UNCCD, DIS4ME and GEF

The aim of this section is to suggest that DIS4ME could help those who need to make use of GEF resources, a broader understanding regarding desertification. It would be a cost effective way of reducing the gap that exists between the insights of the GEF operations plan and the national user who relates things mainly to his own situation.

An important development is the development of the GEF as an instrument for financing actions to combat desertification and land degradation. In 2002 the GEF published its operational guidelines describing the projects that it found to be necessary to address all aspects of land degradation. The GEF is also supporting the LADA programme on Land degradation indicators. Meetings were organised between representatives of the FAO who are managing LADA and DESERTLINKS to discuss how the system could be developed for the specific needs of its own programme. The GEF guidelines focus on sustainable land management as a strategy, on synergies between the different conventions and on getting desertification control policies embedded into the different programmes of administrative sectors. From the UNCCD website it seems that representatives from different countries are being trained to write proposals that would be consistent with the GEF guidelines. At the moment there is an obvious gap. The understanding of land degradation that emerges from reading the GEF documents is consistent with up-to-date paradigms and concepts of land degradation. In comparison, many of the documents available on the UNCCD web site are much less well rounded, sometimes contradictory and often unfocussed. This is because people mainly know their own situation. DIS4ME could provide a useful tool in helping make people aware of the interactions and possibilities. After working with DIS4ME, it would become obvious why the GEF operational plan has adopted the strategies it describes.

3. Dis4 me and The COP 5 Benchmarks and Indicators report

The objective of this section is to suggest that DIS4ME could be a tool that helps the UNCCD evaluate, refine and develop its indicator programme.

The full title of the report is:

“BENCHMARKS AND INDICATORS: Report of the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) on their initiative on the development of benchmarks and indicators”

it can be found at: [I\(CCD/COP\(5\)/CST/7](#)

The Benchmark and indicator report is a valuable document in as much it also benchmarks the current understanding of the committee regarding desertification indicators.

It is not a scientific report as the claims it makes are not substantiated by an evaluation of factual information. Obviously, the authors have a partial but politically and tactically correct grasp regarding the true nature of desertification processes going on around them. DESERTLINKS could clearly play a role in capacity building helping to give causal explanations and the bigger picture.

Contents

The title of the report is “On monitoring-evaluation of impact and implementation indicators for action programmes to combat desertification” and this was presented at Geneva in October 2001. The 25 page report contains three sections on a) concepts and definitions, b) experience and c) selection criteria.

These are considered in turn:

Concepts

The basic concepts are illustrated in the three figures that have been reproduced in the appendix. Figure 1 is self explanatory as it explains the purpose and the context of the report. The second figure is at first confusing in that it presents what it regards as “elements”. However, it can be seen that in some ways DESERTLINKS contains virtually all of the elements indicated and it could therefore have the obvious benefit of helping the UNCCD both integrate and operationalise its methodology. Under the section on concepts the requirements are explained for a) desertification assessment, b) implementation process and c) monitor impact.

Desertification assessment is seen as mainly describing ecological assessment and observation, focussing on changes in land degradation. This is seen as the task of short term projects and long term observatories. Impact monitoring includes the collection and processing of all kinds of information that could reveal the impact of the action programmes to combat desertification. The importance of the context of desertification is stressed. Monitoring NAP implementation involves identifying how different stakeholders are implementing the NAPs at a national Scale. They describe the “dashboard” as containing the combination of key indicators needed to make qualitative and quantitative evaluations. As a reference system the PSR or the DPSIR is recommended.

Comments

Several of the statements made could be contested, especially those regarding the nature of research and the relative importance of bio-physical socio-economic factors. It is clear that the methodology reflects a “product” or map driven view of indicators. Whether or not the data actually mapped reflect “reality” and can be used to identify change is not discussed. The assumptions made about what is actually measurable or practicable are large. What is missing is a conceptual explanation of the changes taking place and which collectively constitute desertification.

For the authors, a major consideration is being able to monitor the implementation of the convention. And here is the major challenge. The indicators look at the administrative actions being undertaken, not at the actual improvements taking place in the real world. What is ignored is the question of attribution. How can we know that it is the actions of the NAP’s that are responsible for any improvement?

In another part of the report we will comment on how successful national action plans have been in achieving their goals. This will show that in the end it all comes down to money and resources. Success is related to effort and money. Most of the Action plans have proposed indicators that record this.

Experience

This part of the report describes positive experience in using indicators. Certain countries are claimed to have good experience and those described in this way are China, Argentina and Mexico. The information presented and the claims made are done so in a very superficial way so it is not possible to verify the claims that are made.

What is suggested is that China for example has produced maps of desertification indicators quite successfully. Whether what they show or not is correct is not evaluated. Where is the data? The experience in South America is also measured more in terms of getting people to work together than in terms of actual results in reducing land degradation.

In Africa, the Agrhymet/cilss and Roselt initiatives are mentioned. However, it is not really obvious how the maps that can be constructed relate to desertification. Desertification is seen from a cartographic perspective. The types of change can suggest how an area has changed over a long time but this is not monitoring.

On page 16 of the report the OSS indicators are described. There are three poverty eradication and ten natural resource management indicators. The primary indicators are not described operationally. DESERTLINKS could be used to provide operational procedures needed for this purpose.

Common impact and implementation indicators

The list of impact indicators is extensive and well thought out. It is in this area that the report has most detail.

The report also condenses what it calls primary indicators. DIS4ME actually does what is proposed in the report.

4. DIS4ME and thematic priorities in Africa: a case study

The objective of this section is to see how DESERTLINKS and DIS4ME might be useful or relevant for the regional thematic priorities.

Regional priorities can be inferred from the so-called Thematic Programme Networks (TPNs) planned in the context of the Regional Action Programme (RAP) to combat desertification. As an example, Africa has been chosen for this report. TPNs are networks of institutions and agencies linked together via an institutional focal point. Regional, sub-regional and national focal institutions will involve all key actors at regional, sub-regional and national in the respective affected countries. It is emphasised that although a number of TPNs are already in place, implementation of activities is still under preparation. This section will describe the African priorities and then assess the contributions that DESERTLINKS could make to the issue of concern.

TPN in Africa

In Africa, the following TPN priorities are described:

- TPN1 Integrated management of international river, lake and hydro-geological basins
- TPN2 Promotion of agro-forestry and soil conservation.
- TPN3 Rational use of rangelands and promotion of fodder crops development.
- TPN4 Ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems.
- TPN5 Promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies.
- TPN6 Promotion of sustainable agricultural farming systems.

The available information would suggest that the TPN are in very different stages of advance.

TPN1 Integrated management of international river, lake and hydro-geological basins

Not enough information is provided about this activity to enable a realistic evaluation to be made.

TPN2 Promotion of Agroforestry and soil conservation

This priority activity is mainly for the promotion of domestication, processing and marketing of agro-forestry products (plant species) of socio-economic interest for African countries and to support the "African Land and Water Management Initiative (ALWMI)" through promotion of agro-forestry inputs and use of African expertise.

Relevance of DIS4ME

Certainly there are many parallels that could be taken from the Annex IV target areas. However, the emphasis here is on developing agro-forestry products appropriate to the local conditions. DIS4ME would need to be extended to cover the situations found in this TPN

TPN3 Rational use of rangelands and promotion of fodder crops development

The are listed at the start-up meeting in Meseru in 2001 are :

- to promote capacity-building in rational use of rangelands and fodder crops development activities that are better implemented at the regional level;
- to strengthen exchange of information and appropriate techniques, technical know-how and relevant experience as it relates to rational use of rangelands and promotion of fodder crops development;
- to co-ordinate and compile activities related to combating desertification from various aspects, undertaken by different stakeholders, in order to prevent duplication and increase efficiency, thus benefiting countries of the regions with minimum expenditure;

- to assist the African country Parties as well as the relevant sub regional and specialized institutions to carry out their obligations in implementing the Convention at regional level.

Relevance of DIS4ME

The interests here are in capacity building and the exchange of information. DESERTLINKS could contribute to this. The specific indicators for a wide range of African rangelands could be added. The third point is very useful.

TPN4 Ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems.

The priorities are described as follows:

- To provide a framework that will facilitate information flow and coordination of activities related to ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems.
- Synthesis and analysis of the existing information.
- A web site needs to be set up linking with other networks and offering the possibility to exchange information.
- Partnerships should be promoted to the benefit of the respective partners.
- Building capacities at all levels is a major task of the network.
- Linking with other regional initiatives is essential.

Relevance of DIS4ME

As above, a major interest is in capacity building and the exchange of information. DESERTLINKS could contribute to this and provide a tool. The specific indicators for a wide range of African ecosystems could be added. DESERTLINKS could then be used for capacity building.

TPN5 Promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies.

The TPN5 is a platform on renewable energies insofar as they relate to combating desertification and the eradication of poverty. It also serves as a framework for consultation and action, bringing together the institutions and organisations operating in the field of development of renewable energies and combating desertification with a view to achieving better cooperation, consultation, coordination and harmonisation of the policies and strategies used for the promotion of such energies. The TPN5 was officially launched during the meeting of the African Ministerial on Energy, held in Nairobi, Kenya on 8 May 2004. A five-year (2004-2009) action programme was developed and adopted during the same meeting.

Relevance of DIS4ME

This issue lies outside of DESERTLINKS and new indicators relevant to this would need to be added.

TPN6 Promotion of sustainable agricultural farming systems

State of activities:

TPN6 aims at, among other objectives, promoting capacity-building, and strengthening exchange of information and appropriate techniques, technical know-how and relevant experience in sustainable agricultural farming systems. In general, the network will coordinate activities related to combating desertification through promotion of sustainable agricultural farming systems from various efforts undertaken by different stakeholders, in order to prevent duplication and to increase efficiency.

The programme was launched very recently in Tunis, Tunisia on 22-24 November 2004.

The official report of the meeting with recommendations, conclusions and action plan will be posted on this site soon.

Relevance of DIS4ME

DESERTLINKS could be developed as a tool in capacity building. This is perhaps the most relevant activity. This is probably what the LADA project is doing and it is the main GEF strategy.

5. National Action Plans

The objective of this section is to review how contributions could be made at the level of the National Action Plans.

Introduction

There are very many national action plans and most of these demonstrate a strong national identity. National Action Plans in different degrees of elaboration were examined with the idea of evaluating how relevant DIS4ME might be for the National Committees. Some countries (South Africa and Indonesia) have very well advanced strategies and plans in progress with ongoing projects. Others have good ideas (Lesotho Kazakstan)) but clearly miss resources and administrative capacity.

South Africa

From The National Action Plan for South Africa, it can be concluded that there is a clear appreciation of the challenges posed by desertification (see Figure 6.1 page 10), and a vision regarding the future actions to be taken. This is reflected in the Table (Table 6.3 page 18), showing the forms of land degradation and the types of intervention needed to deal with it.

What is interesting are Tables such as Table 8.5 in the report (page 36) in which the link is made with other policies, in this case Water Resource Management. In Europe water, soil and land management policy are separated by the Water Framework Directive and the kind of integration needed by Europe is already present in South Africa. South Africa could be an example for Europe. Another example is also illustrated for mining (Table 8.6). Table 9.2 summarises all of the Intervention projects that are relevant for the NAP.

A task team on indicators (page 80) says that a system of indicators must be in place to monitor land degradation. The requirements are all listed and links are made to national and other data sources. DESERTLINKS could be very relevant as a model for developing a Southern African version of DIS4ME that made use of all of the information available but which focussed on the different issues and context of South Africa.

Indonesia

<http://www.unccd.int/actionprogrammes/asia/national/2002/indonesia-eng.pdf>

The NAP for Indonesia also shows a clear vision regarding desertification in the dry regions of the country. A lot of information is provided about how to prevent degradation and restore degraded land. There are many excellent projects that seem to be effective.

Benchmarks and indicators are described on page 18 in the above report and these are reproduced in the appendix. There are seven categories of headline indicators and some of these are interesting possibilities for DIS4ME. Not much information is provided but the choices made are comprehensive and effective. There are many examples of well thought out projects being undertaken.

Collaborating with Indonesia could be interesting as there is a lot of information that could be used for an Indonesian Indicator system.

Kazakstan

<http://www.unccd.int/actionprogrammes/asia/national/2005/kazakstan-eng.pdf>

The Kazakstan national action plan is rather short and it is mainly in the form of an inventory. Nevertheless it contains a large amount of information about the problems that are being faced.

The second phase of the NAP will involve the formulation of a policy of sustainable land management. Because of this, DIS4ME could be useful in helping to demonstrate interrelationships between the different processes described. Kazakstan might an example of a country where institutional resources need to be increased.

The Aral Sea problem is also faced by Kazakstan and this is one of the major current concerns.

Romania

Romania has a very informative National Action Plan that gives an informative impression of the causes and factors of desertification. There seems to be an excellent information base and a lot of knowledge regarding the environment. The different forms of land degradation and the policies needed are described. A lot of emphasis is given to describing drought and aridity problems. In terms of indicators, these are reported under the heading of monitoring. There is a long list of indicators that could be compared with those from DESERTLINKS. A DIS4ME application in Romania would probably be quite feasible.

Lesotho

Lesotho has a well conceived programme and much experience in dealing with the problems that affect the country. Many projects are in place and the efforts being made to meet goals are clearly reported with excellent indicators. The main problem is that of resources.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- DESERTLINKS and DIS4ME constitute a Information and Indicator System for Desertification Indicators that was developed with the UNCCD in mind as an end user.
- DESERTLINKS would benefit the capacity building in support of the operational plan of the GEF.
- DESERTLINKS could provide a coherent conceptual framework for indicators and benchmarks.
- Collaborative work could be done with the NAPs in countries such as South Africa, Romania, Indonesia, where there are well developed plans.
- Countries with less capacity could be supported with indicators.