



DESERTLINKS

COMBATING DESERTIFICATION IN MEDITERRANEAN EUROPE LINKING SCIENCE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

CONTRACT EVK2-CT-2001-00109

DELIVERABLE 1.1e (ii) DIS4ME Introduction for Indicators and National Action Plans N. Geeson

**CO-ORDINATORS: DR JANE BRANDT AND DR NICHOLA GEESON,
KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON**

Website: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/projects/desertlinks>

(Introduction for Indicators and National Action Plans)

Nichola Geeson, King's College London

The role of the UNCCD¹

After the UNCED Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 the profile of desertification was raised at both political and scientific levels. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was introduced, and approved in Paris on the 17th June 1994 by 103 countries.

Two of the most important reasons for the establishment of this convention were:

- i) to create an international legal tool (binding for all the signatory countries) to combat desertification in countries affected by serious drought and/or desertification
- ii) to promote local empowerment to involve local populations in the mitigation of desertification

The first action of the UNCCD was the resolution of the Convention principles and the definition of four regional annexes: Africa; Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; and the Northern Mediterranean, including Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece.

For each signatory country the main objectives of the Convention to Combat Desertification are:

1. to ensure the commitment of all affected countries to pursue their obligations under the framework of the convention
2. to prepare and implement National, Regional and Sub-regional Action Programmes
3. to adopt "bottom-up" approaches to stimulate public awareness and involvement
4. to stimulate international co-operation to combat desertification at the scientific, social and political levels, and also to support Agenda 2000, the Climate Change Convention and the Biodiversity Convention.

The Convention stresses the role to be played by national governments and non-governmental organisations in combating desertification, through the implementation of National Action Programmes², through scientific and technical co-operation, and by consistent support measures and promotion of public awareness of the desertification problem.

The response of the Annex IV sub-region: the northern Mediterranean³

Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece have responded to the objectives of the Convention by addressing the specific problems in their countries and by contributing to research and practical initiatives on a European scale. Each country has developed data bases and

¹ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification <http://www.unccd.int>

² <http://www.unccd.int/actionprogrammes/menu.php>

³ Actions taken by national governmental and non-governmental organisations to mitigate desertification in the Mediterranean. S. Burke and JB Thornes (Eds), 1998. Concerted Action Report 1, EUR 18490 EN

indicators according to individual mapping and monitoring strategies, but many of the indicators are common to all countries.

Portugal ratified the Convention on 1st April 1996. Coordinated by the Direcção Geral de Florestas, a large data base was set up in preparation for developing the National Action Programme in co-operation with the scientific community, local authorities and government regional departments. This was submitted to the UNCCD in 2000. Drought had seriously affected Portugal, particularly in the SE, between 1991 and 1994 so the idea of desertification was very relevant. However, some Portuguese people still consider desertification to be synonymous with depopulation of marginal rural areas due to migration and land abandonment. More recently the link between forest fires and desertification has become an important issue.

Spain has a long history of actions to mitigate desertification, as more than two thirds of the country is arid, semi-arid or dry-sub-humid. There have been a series of Watershed Restoration and Management Projects, and the LUCDEME Project to combat desertification in the Mediterranean. There has been particular emphasis on sustainable agriculture and exploitation of water resources, prediction of drought, and protection against forest and wild fires. Programmes for mapping, monitoring and mitigating desertification are well-developed.

In Italy the most affected areas are in the south, including Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily. Again, protection from fire is a prominent issue, alongside soil conservation and management of water resources. Land abandonment, over-exploitation of water resources for irrigation and over-grazing are being addressed. The National Action Programme was submitted to the UNCCD in 2000.

In Greece deforestation, grazing and forest fires have been considered to be the biggest problems. Since ancient times extensive deforestation and intensive cultivation of slopes have led to soil erosion and degradation, and there have been many reforestation schemes. However forest fires are also a major threat to soil conservation, especially where pines and eucalyptus have been planted. The National Action Programme was submitted to the UNCCD in 2001.