

B I O D I V E R S I T Y

D E S E R T I F I C A T I O N

WESCANA

Desertification Programme Centre in the West/Central Asia and North Africa Region

- › COLLABORATIVE
MANAGEMENT
- › ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- › ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY
- › TRANS-NATIONALITY





Background and rationale

One quarter of the Earth's land surface is vulnerable to desertification, according to estimates by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Desertification jeopardises the livelihoods of over 1 billion people in more than 100 countries as farming and grazing land becomes less productive. It is estimated that millions of people were and are forced to abandon their land because of soil degradation processes.

As defined by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), desertification is a process of "land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities".

Patches of degraded land can develop hundreds of kilometres from the nearest desert, but are capable of expanding and linking together, creating desert-like conditions.

Desertification contributes to other environmental calamities, such as the loss of biodiversity and global warming. Main significant causes include social and economic factors in developing countries, such as poverty, high population growth rates, unequal land distribution, refugee flows, and the disruption of traditional farming

methods, the latter being often linked to unsustainable development policies. At the same time, arid and semi-arid areas, which may be called collectively "dry-lands", are one of the world's important biomes for their unique biological heritage well adapted to scarcity of water resources. Their own ecological resilience are also negatively affected by desertification processes.

It becomes therefore critical to prevent further degradation and preserve dry-lands resources, which are part of the global biodiversity.

This can be attained through the adoption of a systemic and coordinated approach, which integrates the social, economic and ecological aspects of desertification that have an impact on the degradation of dry-land ecosystems and their natural resources, at both policy and implementation levels.

Aridity, highly specialized fauna and flora and land-use practices well adapted to conditions of water scarcity, are a natural and unifying feature of the countries of the West/Central Asia and North Africa (WESCAN) Region. However, the absence of an integrated and coordinated approach to combat desertification in this Region adds to

a number of other key constraints. These include the limited capacity and know-how for coordination and networking among relevant institutions and actors, the lack of integrated information and database on desertification, and the limited access to information and networks. Also, the general lack of awareness on the consequences of unsustainable land and water use, which partly results from the loss, the misjudgment and the low ability to mobilise traditional knowledge and know-how, contributes to accelerate desertification processes. Indeed, bad and ineffective governance and policies contribute to marginalise local communities and indigenous peoples, in particular nomadic and landless groups, and force them to adopt short-term resources use strategies, which further aggravate the problem. The Italian Cooperation is actively engaged in programmes and projects aiming at influencing policies and practices that combat desertification and land degradation. Consistently, it promotes the implementation of the UNCCD, through interventions at national and regional levels and through support to the Secretariat of the Convention itself. Among these, an Action Programme UNCCD-Convention on Biodiversity for the





integration of post-Rio processes was started and the Matera International Centre for Traditional Knowledge on Desertification has been established. The Italian Cooperation also supports and collaborates with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) on dry-land/desertification issues in WESCANA countries. Since 1995, IUCN's programme on Arid Land Biodiversity in North Africa has gained a wide experience on issues related to desertification in the Region. Furthermore, IUCN has already assisted many of its members and partners in formulating and implementing projects relevant to desertification in WESCANA countries. In this context, the present programme is agreed between the Italian Cooperation, IUCN members in Iran and the IUCN Secretariat, and intends to assist the countries in WESCANA Region to prepare a coherent programme of activities to combat desertification, by establishing a Desertification Centre in Iran. This means to be the first step of a long-term initiative, for the development of synergies between the UNCCD and the Convention on Biological Diversity and the pursuit of sustainable development in the region. The Italian Cooperation supports the Programme through its Core Fund Agreement with IUCN, which is the executing and implementing agency.

Goal, objectives and results

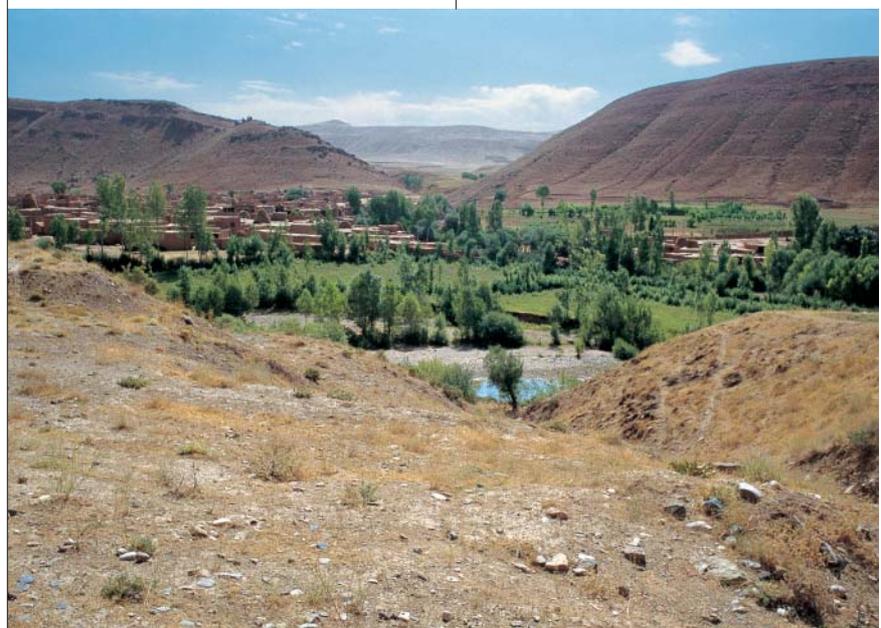
The development goal of the Programme is to promote the sustainable management of arid and semi-arid areas in WESCANA Region, including their biodiversity resources which should be conserved or rehabilitated through the participation and action of local communities.

The specific objectives of the Programme are as follows.

- ➊ Promote a systemic and integrated approach to combat desertification at the levels of policy and decision-making processes and field implementation.
- ➋ Facilitate the dissemination and exchange of accurate and relevant

information through the establishment of a regional network of networks.

- ➌ Assess, record, and where appropriate revitalise and promote, traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices.
- ➍ Formulate and promote policies for the sustainable use of natural resources, based on the assessment and dissemination of experiences from the projects implemented within the Programme and from other initiatives on dry-lands.
- ➎ Promote a systemic and coordinated approach to combat desertification, by developing projects to combat desertification in selected pilot sites in each dry-land/desert biome at national and trans-boundary levels, through participatory resources management.





Expected results include the following.

- ❶ The Regional Desertification Programme Centre in Iran is consolidated as the focal point for the regional network of networks to combat desertification.
- ❷ Technological know-how is acquired for the management and/or rehabilitation of dry-lands.
- ❸ Capacities are strengthened through the training of the local actors involved in the pilot projects, including local communities and NGOs, Government departments and other stakeholders.
- ❹ Collaborative management agreements on the sustainable and equitable management of biodiversity resources under dry-land conditions are concluded among the stakeholders of the different pilot projects.
- ❺ Traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices are assessed, recorded, and

promoted, as well as integrated into modern tools and techniques for the sustainable use of natural resources.

- ❶ The implementation of policies and conventions, in particular the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, is coordinated in the WESCANA Region in order to develop synergies among them and strengthen their positive impact.

Implementation and results

The Programme is implemented according to the guiding principles of the WESCANA Regional Programme Framework. These include the development of regional collaboration, the engagement of civil society and the full involvement of IUCN-WESCANA members.

More specifically, the Programme is carrying out the following activities.

- ❶ Negotiations are underway for the formal establishment of the Thematic Regional Desertification Centre in Iran.
- ❷ Technical assistance is being provided in the management and/or rehabilitation of desert biodiversity resources in pilot project areas.
- ❸ Pilot income-generation projects have started, implemented by the local communities. Through these pilot initiatives, collaborative management agreements will be established among stakeholders, for the sustainable and equitable management of natural resources.
- ❹ The training of the local actors involved in the pilot projects, including local communities and NGOs, Government departments and other stakeholders, is under implementation. Main topic is the sustainable management of natural resources.
- ❺ An assessment is under implementation of traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices, as well as of modern tools and practices, in order to select, upgrade, promote and integrate the most appropriate ones into extension programmes for the sustainable management of natural resources.
- ❻ A proposal for re-addressing conventional approaches to rangeland management is under formulation.

