

Beijing Statement
on
Combating Desertification
and Promoting Sustainable Development
(24 January 2008)

The State Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with the support from the secretariat of the UNCCD and other UN organizations, jointly organized the International Conference on Combating Desertification, in Beijing, from 22-24 January 2008, where representatives of governments, organizations of the United Nations system and other international and regional institutions, as well as major groups, held interactive discussions on the global challenges of desertification and measures to combat it. Key points highlighted during the presentations include the following:

Global dimension of desertification

Desertification is a global issue, with serious implications for worldwide eco-safety, food security, socio-economic stability, and sustainable development. Among the most affected countries are the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries and small island developing States, which are faced with serious difficulties in combating desertification and land degradation and meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

Desertification-poverty nexus in developing countries

The high level of rural poverty in many developing countries, particularly in Africa, continues to be among the most serious constraints to progress in combating desertification and land degradation. At the same time, desertification and land degradation exacerbates rural poverty in affected developing countries.

Alternative livelihoods that provide income-generating opportunities can help reduce the pressure on land and ecosystems and alleviate poverty.

Strengthening synergies to support implementation

The 10-year strategic plan and framework adopted by the 8th Session of the Conference of the Parties to UNCCD has strengthened the commitment of the international community to implement the Convention at all levels. It enables the Convention to be more broadly engaged on the frontline of combating desertification and land degradation, mitigating the effects of drought, as well as contributing to combating climate change. In this respect, UNCCD serves as a platform for adaptation to climate change, mitigation and resilience.

Strengthening synergies among the three Rio conventions – UNCCD, UNFCCC and the CBD - is strongly encouraged to enhance coordination of actions and opportunities for mutual benefits in combating desertification, preserving dryland ecosystems, conserving wetlands, and combating climate change.

Forests play an important role in both preventing desertification and land degradation as well as in rehabilitating degraded lands. The implementation of the “Non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests” adopted by the General Assembly in 2007 provides a framework for advancing sustainable forest management and its contribution to combating desertification, mitigating climate change and preserving forest biological diversity.

Integration of action programmes to combat desertification into development frameworks

National action programmes are practical tools in combating desertification and implementing UNCCD. Given that desertification reaches across sectors, it is essential to ensure coordination among all relevant government agencies at the central and local levels in the implementation of NAPs, with active involvement of civil society. It is therefore important to mainstream NAPs in national sustainable development strategies and poverty reduction plans.

Strengthening support by the international community through bilateral, regional and sub-regional cooperation will remain crucial for implementing action programmes to combat desertification and land degradation.

NAP implementation should be based on integrated approaches and supported by legislation.

It is essential to improve the mode of economic growth and means of production and consumption to achieve harmony between conservation and development, as well as balance between economic and social benefits.

Participation of local communities

Participation of local communities in combating desertification is essential. Partnerships and strategic alliances are important institutional frameworks for programme and project implementation at the community level.

Market access

Ensuring more equitable access of farmers to regional and global markets and providing practical help and capacity-building to these stakeholders in marketing agricultural products is essential to their willingness to invest in long-term sustainable land management since they would be able to reap the future rewards of such investment.

Investment and resources mobilization

Combating desertification and land degradation requires large and long-term investments that are difficult to mobilize from central and local government budgets alone. It also requires providing economic and non-economic incentives to stakeholders, including small-scale land users, to invest in the sustainable management of land, forests and other natural resources. Such incentives may include, among others, establishing tenure security and access rights to land,

water and forests, facilitating access to credits and technology, including IT, at favorable terms, improving early warning and information exchange on desertification and drought, and capacity-building.

International development cooperation can play a critical role in mobilizing resources, including official development assistance, in contributing to investments in combating desertification and land degradation, in improved technology and technology transfer and in rural development.

Traditional knowledge

Utilizing traditional and indigenous knowledge, particularly in natural resources management, has proven to be an effective way in dealing with problems associated with desertification and land degradation at the local and household levels.

Education and awareness-raising

Education is an important tool for awareness-raising on issues related to desertification and land degradation and a better understanding of the desertification-poverty-development nexus. Updating curricula for different levels of education and promoting frameworks for dialogue and advocacy are among the practical measures that can be undertaken, in this regard.

Information and early warning

Information and early warning play a crucial role in awareness raising and capacity-building. Well-functioning information and early-warning systems allow effective management of risks associated with drought, desertification and land degradation, and climate change, and help build up resilience in affected countries.

Expression of thanks

Conference participants expressed their gratitude to the Government of the People's Republic of China and to the United Nations for successfully convening this International Conference, and to the Beijing Municipality for the warm welcome extended to all participants.