

Sida and the Convention to Combat Desertification

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SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION AGENCY

Department for Natural Resources
and the Environment

Foreword

A large number of countries are affected by problems related to desertification and drought. This is particularly the case of countries in Africa and the Middle East. Countries such as China, India, the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, Brazil, Chile and several OECD countries are also affected in different ways. It is estimated that about a billion people live in dryland areas.

Issues concerning dryland areas are consequently a global problem. Africa is particularly affected since such a large proportion of the continent consists of arid and semi-arid areas.

Sida and its predecessors have given attention to and worked with dryland area problems for a long period of time and in different ways. Experience gained by Sida was presented in the report "Development of Dryland Areas – Sida's Response to the Convention to Combat Desertification", published in September 1997.

At the request of the Swedish Government, Sida participated actively in the negotiations concerning the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. Sida has also participated in the four Conferences of Parties held so far. Future work in the area will make demands on Sweden in its programmes of multilateral and bilateral development cooperation.

All in all this has led to a need to summarise experience gained in Sida's work in the area hitherto, and to draw up a strategy for work in the future.

The strategy in this report has been drawn up in consultations between Sida's Department for Natural Resources and the Environment, NATUR, and the Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC. The Department for Cooperation with NGOs and Humanitarian Assistance, SEKA, has also been consulted. In any further development of the strategy it is probable that other departments at Sida will be affected.

NATUR has the main responsibility for this document, which was first printed in March 1998. This version has been somewhat updated.

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Introduction

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification has the aim of combating desertification and alleviating the effects of drought, particularly in Africa. The background is the extensive degradation of land in the dry areas of the world, caused by both climatic factors and human activities. Ultimately the Convention is about the living conditions of almost one thousand million (or one billion) people who live in the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas.

The Convention has a clear effect on Sweden's development cooperation – practically all Sweden's partner countries in eastern and southern Africa have dryland areas within their territories.

This document presents the results of an ongoing process which has the aim of harmonising Sida's work with Sweden's undertakings vis-à-vis the Convention to Combat Desertification. The report is in three sections:

1. *The Convention and desertification.* This provides a background to the Convention itself, describes production conditions in dryland areas, and the difficult challenge of combating desertification.
2. *Sida's experience.* This describes the work Sida has done hitherto in the affected areas and presents experience gained from this work.
3. *Sida's strategy for its work with the Convention.* This presents Sida's overall approach to the incorporation of the Convention in Sida's work, presents strategic priorities in this respect, and proposes activities and contributions in Sida's programmes of multilateral, regional and bilateral development cooperation.

I. The Convention and desertification

Background

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification¹ came into force on December 26, 1996, and the work of transforming it into practice has been started. Since the Convention emphasises the development in Africa's dryland areas, Sida's contributions are a very significant for Sweden's actions under the Convention. This is further accentuated by the Convention's broad definition of drylands: arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. It therefore covers most African countries, apart from the humid Central African states. By and large all Sida's partner countries are among those that are affected to some extent by desertification and drought. Even dryland areas in other continents, including Europe, are covered by the Convention.

Fact box

- The Convention to Combat Desertification came into being through a decision of the Rio Conference, as did, for example the Conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity.
- The objective is to combat desertification and alleviate the consequences of drought in the areas affected, particularly in Africa, through integrated, long-term strategies.
- One basic concept is to build on local expertise and capacity.
- The Convention emphasises the importance of science and research.

The problem of desertification² was first taken seriously in connection with the extensive drought in the Sahel region between 1968 and 1973. As a consequence of the drought, the UN established a special office for the problems in the Sahel region – UNSO (United Nations Sahelian Office). Sahel came to be a symbol for desertification in Africa. However, there are also considerable problems with land degradation and drought in southern and eastern Africa, in countries where Sida has extensive commitments. The drought in southern Africa in 1992 and 1993 was a striking example of this.

Over time we have learnt that desertification cannot be stopped merely by planting trees. Climate, population growth, the selection of appropriate methods for forestry and agriculture, social and cultural conditions, micro and macro economic conditions, issues concerning ownership and the right to use land, equality between women and men etc, all these factors are involved. There is also

¹ The full title of the Convention is: *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.*

² "Desertification" refers to land degradation caused by human activities and climatic variations – often in combination. Desertification can consequently occur far from the desert.

a lack of knowledge about the complex relationships between them. In other words it is difficult to separate the problem of desertification from general development issues. It is not only the natural resources sector that is affected.

One precondition for the application of the Convention is therefore that most of Sida's departments are involved – as is the case with the other international conventions originating from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, UNCED.

Fact box

- The Convention covers arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas totalling some 5.1 billion hectares.
- The definition of a dry area is an area in which the ratio of annual precipitation to potential evapotranspiration falls within the range from 0.05 to 0.65.
- Almost one billion people live in areas affected by drought and desertification.
- Of the drylands in the world that are used for agriculture, 70 per cent are affected by land degradation.
- Each year sees the loss of six million hectares of productive farming land.

The production capacity of dry areas

In a given climate, production in the agricultural sector depends on the fertility of the soil and access to water, as well as methods of cultivation and technologies selected. Small farmers in dry areas choose their technologies on the basis of a number of factors, for example, tradition; knowledge; availability of capital, labour and seeds; spreading risks; the land-ownership situation, and so on. Unsuitable technologies and land use, in interaction with climatic factors, can degenerate the land, while suitable farming methods have the effect that the fertility of the soil can be retained and erosion and salinisation avoided.

The availability of water is of decisive importance for biological production in dry areas, as well as for health and sanitation. Dryland areas do not just have low amounts of rainfall. The rainfall is also irregular. The rain season varies in length and intensity each year and variations are also great between years. In dry areas it is particularly important to make the best possible use of available water, to avoid evaporation and to strive to use the water for production purposes or for replenishing the ground water. In other words food security in dry areas is dependent on the uncertain availability of water, and harvests in these areas vary considerably from one year to another. The cultivation strategy of small farmers in these areas is often to minimise risks rather than to maximise production.

In dry areas existing water resources – rivers and wetlands – are of great significance. These *wetlands in drylands* are not only more productive and have larger concentrations of people. They are also extremely valuable from the perspective of biodiversity. In dry areas irrigation is an important method of

increasing productivity where access to rivers, lakes or groundwater so permits. However, dry areas have high levels of evaporation which often leads to salinisation. Water quality, drainage aspects and selection of technologies are of decisive importance for sustainable irrigation. Irrigation in dry areas is difficult, risky and capital-intensive. Small farms are usually obliged to use existing natural water resources economically – for example through methods for *rainwater harvesting*.

The productivity of farming activities which are dependent on rainfall is low in dry areas. This, in combination with poor infrastructure and considerable distances to markets, has the affect that investments in agriculture in dry areas carry the risk of low levels of profitability.

In semi-arid areas the nomadic pastoral system is the traditional way of using the land. However, population growth is threatening the pastoral system in several ways: conflicts with settled farmers are increasing, and there is a risk that the land cannot support large herds of cattle. This leads to an increase in the strains on vegetation and to land degradation. When drought occurs, the pastoralists' herds of cattle suffer considerable losses.

An increasing amount of attention is being given to local, traditional knowledge about the sensitive ecosystems in dryland areas.

The challenge

Breaking the vicious circle leading to land degradation is a difficult challenge. It is an apparently insoluble problem, i.e. to reduce pressure on the natural resources so that a recovery can take place and, at the same time, improve the living standards of poor people in rural areas. One major problem is that the dry areas cannot “stand” large investments. The productivity provided by nature is, in certain cases, quite simply too low to yield a return on investments in, for example, fertilisers. The struggle against land degradation must therefore be conducted outside the natural resources sector, through general economic growth.

But even where arable land is concerned, a great deal can naturally be done in respect of methods development, training and advisory services, local organisations and processes, institution development, research, policy work, and so on. Improvements to infrastructure and trade can play an important role.

It should also be pointed out that the wide definition of dry areas – arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid – covers an enormous range where biophysical and socio-economic conditions for development are concerned.

Knowledge about the underlying causes of desertification is still not satisfactory, for example in respect of policy issues, ownership and user rights issues, or the relations between urban and rural areas, and the interaction between areas of high production and low production. Therefore a technical and scientific committee is included in the Convention's organisation that will take up these and other matters.

The Convention emphasises the importance of combating desertification and counteracting the effects of drought through a long-term, integrated approach in order to contribute to a sustainable use of natural resources.

II. Sida's experience

Sida's contributions in dryland areas

A review of Swedish support in dryland areas³ during the last decade included 101 ongoing or finalised contributions in 17 countries, of which 13 were in Africa. The review included contributions in the natural resources sectors: agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and soil conservation, and in water supply and sanitation. Tables 1 and 2 describe these contributions.

Table 1. Direct contributions in dryland areas

<i>Department</i>	<i>Type of contribution</i>	<i>Country/contribution</i>
NATUR	Bilateral research projects/support	Burkina Faso, Tanzania to research organisations Namibia
	Bilateral development programmes in agriculture, soil conservation and the environment	India, Lesotho, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tunisia
	Bilateral environmental programmes in the water sector	Namibia
	Multilateral development programmes in soil conservation	Sahel programme
SAREC	Bilateral research projects – mainly via Swedish applications	Botswana, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia
	Regional research programmes/networks	Eg DHP, FOREP, PINEP, RPSUD
	International research organisations	ICARDA, ICRISAT
INEC	Water transfers	Zimbabwe
SEKA	Humanitarian Assistance	A number of countries in southern, western, and eastern Africa

³ Rudebjer P, 1997. *Development of dryland areas – Sida's response to the Convention to Combat Desertification*. Publications on Agriculture and Rural Development: No. 7. Stockholm, Sida.

Table 2. Contributions which partly concern dryland areas

<i>Department</i>	<i>Type of contribution</i>	<i>Country/contribution</i>
NATUR	Bilateral development programmes for agriculture, soil conservation and the environment	Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia
	Bilateral programmes for water, health and sanitation	Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe
	Regional research and methods development programmes/networks	Incl. FARMESA, RSCU-RELMA, SADC-ELMS, AAS, SPGRC, SPAAR, SACCAR, ASARECA
	International research organisations	ICRAF
	International NGOs	IUCN, IIED
	Global research and methods development programmes	FTPP, FAO
	Global water networks	GWP
SAREC	Bilateral research projects – mainly via Swedish applications	Ethiopia
	Regional support for development research	Incl. AAS, IFS
	International research organisations and institutes	CIFOR, ICIPE, ICRAF ILRI, IPGRI
SEKA	Contributions to NGOs, e.g. for tree planting	Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda
DESO	Regional environmental statistics	Southern Africa

Focus and experience

- Sida's action programmes for sustainable development, poverty, and equality between women and men are well in line with the intentions of the Convention to Combat Desertification.
- Sida emphasises production aspects and the sustainable use of natural resources in its country programmes, Production and the environment are handled in an integrated manner rather than separately, an approach that can also be found in the Convention.
- Sida has considerable commitments in dryland areas, particularly in eastern and southern Africa. The work covers a broad spectrum, from support to NGOs at the local level to global contributions of a policy character. It includes both development and research programmes.
- Sida has worked successfully with soil conservation in national and regional programmes, primarily in eastern and southern Africa.
- Sida has extensive experience of popular participation in agriculture and soil conservation. Experience of this type has also been acquired in West Africa.
- Where work on the Convention is concerned, Sida has a comparative advantage in eastern and southern Africa. In West Africa Sida has little experience and this experience was acquired some years ago.

- In both eastern and southern Africa Sida has long-standing cooperation with regional organisations which can play an important role in the work with the Convention, for example SADC-ELMS.
- Through the Global Water Partnership Sida has access to an innovative model for networking.
- A great deal of research into dryland areas is financed by Sida, chiefly via Sida's Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC. The support is channelled through Swedish applications, regional networks and international organisations. A number of Swedish institutions are involved.

Limitations

- Sida's experience of arid and semi-arid lands is deliberately limited – most work has been done in dry sub-humid areas where natural conditions for production are better.
- Dryland areas are included in many bilateral programmes, but there is no special strategy on how work with these areas shall be pursued.
- Integration between forestry and agriculture has gradually increased, while other sectors are still only loosely linked to the contributions.
- Sida-financed research is often pursued separately, and not in direct interaction with the development programmes. Research should be pursued independently to a certain extent, but in other cases synergy effects can be achieved through close cooperation between research and development, for example in respect of "local knowledge".
- The potential for coordination between Sida's departments in respect of work in dryland areas has not been fully exploited.
- With the exception of a few research-oriented programmes, pastoral systems are rarely included in Sida's contributions portfolio.
- Livestock issues have been given low priority at the present time, with the exception of fodder production.
- Sida has little experience of irrigation.
- The interaction between urban and rural areas and the relationship between dry areas and more productive areas has not been addressed to any great extent.

III. Sida's strategy for its work on the Convention

Overall points of departure

Sida intends to devote a great deal of attention to dryland area issues. Sida's action programmes for sustainable development, poverty, and equality between women and men are well in line with the intentions of the Convention. The same can be said of several of the instruments used by Sida: for example the guidelines for environmental impact assessments and handbooks for gender equality in agriculture and the water sector. The work on the Convention therefore follows the general focus of Sida's work.

Sida's role in the work with the Convention is to integrate dryland area issues into programmes of bilateral and regional development cooperation, and to contribute its experience gained in this respect in its multilateral work.

Sida's limitations where personnel resources are concerned have the effect that the work on the Convention must be handled in an economical way where staff are concerned. This means, for example, having a geographical and thematic focus, and seeking simple administrative solutions.

Sida's point of departure is to integrate the work on the Convention into ongoing contributions, rather than to develop a new agenda for dryland areas. This means that Sida will be restrictive in its support to new, extensive contributions which are specifically aimed at dryland areas.

Most of Sida's financial instruments can be used for the work on the Convention: 1) country programmes, 2) regional contributions, 3) special environmental programmes – multilateral support, 4) special environmental programmes – bilateral development cooperation, 5) support to NGOs.

Sida's ambition is to have a holistic view of its contributions and activities vis-à-vis the Convention. This type of approach is important for Sida's strategic thinking, programming and reporting.

Strategic priorities

Sida shall follow the work done in the Convention's institutions: the Permanent Secretariat, the Global Mechanism, the Committee on Science and Technology and the Conference of Parties.

Where dryland areas are concerned, Sida intends to continue to give priority to contributions which focus on water resources, soil conservation, methods for popular participation, dryland forests, and issues concerning owner and user rights. On the other hand livestock issues will not be given priority at present, with the exception of aspects relating to fodder.

Sida will follow aspects of special importance for dryland areas, such as equality between women and men, the relationship between urban and rural areas, trade,

the macro-economy, the interaction between areas with a high potential and dryland areas.

Geographically Sida will give priority to its work on the Convention in Africa, particularly eastern and southern Africa. Focus will also be given to West Africa.

Multilaterally and internationally Sida will support certain functions directly linked to the Convention, support research into dryland areas via CGIAR, and cooperate in the spirit of the convention in UN agencies, the World Bank and the EU.

Regionally Sida will support organisations for regional cooperation within the framework of the convention, particularly in eastern and southern Africa. SADC-ELMS and RELMA are two key programmes.

Bilaterally Sida will integrate its work on the convention into ongoing country programmes. Whenever possible and suitable, Sida will support national initiatives and processes related to the Convention process such as the development of the so-called National Action Programmes.

Sida will promote further support to dryland area research via a variety of channels. The establishment of national and regional institutions, and mechanisms for regional networking, will be given priority. Sida will work to strengthen its cooperation with Swedish universities involved in dryland area issues.

NGOs play a key role in the Convention process. Sida intends to support a variety of NGOs which, in different ways, are linked to the Convention. This includes both international NGOs such as IUCN and IIED, and small local NGOs.

Internally Sida will seek to incorporate the Convention in its daily work, in a way which corresponds, for example, to the Conventions on Biological Diversity and Climate Change.

Activities and contributions

Multilateral/international

- 1) Sida supports the convention's organisations through
 - following the development of the Global Mechanism, and having a certain degree of preparedness to support the forthcoming work,
 - taking action to ensure that the Global Mechanism takes full advantage of the experience gained by the GWP,
 - having ensured that a Swedish resource person is attached to the Global Mechanism as Managing Director,
 - allocating certain resources for work in the Committee on Science and Technology: for Swedish participation in the committee; for the work to be done prior to the 1998 meeting on local knowledge, and for a study of existing networks, which is being made by UNEP,

- contributing to the participation of developing countries, including NGOs, participation in the international meetings of the Convention, particularly the annual Conference of Parties.
- 2) Sida intends to cooperate in the spirit of the Convention with different UN agencies, the EU and the World Bank by
- monitoring aspects of poverty and gender equality in dryland areas in the development of strategies and programmes,
 - stimulating processes for popular participation within the framework of multilateral programmes,
 - continuing to promote an emphasis on production aspects in the work on the convention,
 - consider how earlier cooperation with UNDP/UNSO can be maintained but, at the same time, change in focus to strategic activities, for example in respect of methods development or the exchange of knowledge.

Regional

- 1) In southern Africa Sida intends to
- continue to support SADC-ELMS which has SADC's mandate to be responsible for the work on the Convention,
 - wherever possible and suitable to support regional aspects of the work on the Convention, for example the development of Sub-regional Action Programmes and Regional Action Programmes,
 - work actively to ensure that experience gained in bilateral programmes, such as PTC in Lesotho, are spread regionally.
- 2) In eastern Africa Sida intends to:
- use RELMA's expertise and networks to continue to develop methods for soil conservation and popular participation and to devote more attention to dryland areas within RELMA's geographical mandate, for example in respect of rainwater harvesting,
 - use RELMA to publish and spread information related to the Convention,
 - wherever possible and suitable to support regional aspects of the work on the Convention, for example the development of Sub-regional Action Programmes and Regional Action Programmes,
 - work actively to ensure that experience gained in bilateral programmes, such as LAMP in Tanzania, is spread regionally.
- 3) In West Africa Sida intends to:
- continue to support a programme for forestry research in Burkina Faso,
 - refrain at present from extending its activities in the region in view of its limited personnel resources.

Bilateral

- 1) Bilaterally, in the countries affected, Sida intends to
 - integrate the Convention into ongoing programmes of cooperation.
 - wherever possible and appropriate, support national processes and initiatives related to the Convention, for example the development of National Action Programmes,
 - refrain from adopting a donor coordination role (chef de file) in the partner countries but, on the other hand, where appropriate, to support the partner countries' own efforts to coordinate support,
 - observe how and to what extent the problems of dryland areas have been included in programmes of cooperation in programme reviews and evaluations,
 - in its work on the Convention, focus primarily on dry sub-humid areas and, to a much lesser extent, semi-arid and arid areas,
 - work actively to ensure that its extensive experience of soil conservation and popular participation in dry sub-humid areas is spread among countries and regions by stimulating South-South cooperation between bilateral programmes.

Research and capacity building

- 1) Internationally Sida intends to
 - follow the work in ICRISAT's Desert Margin Initiative as well as relevant activities in ICARDA,
 - ensure that dryland areas are given relevant attention in the renegotiations of support to CGIAR institutions,
 - consider supporting research into forests in dryland areas in eastern and southern Africa, for example via CIFOR.
- 2) Sida intends to support African research related to dryland areas by:
 - stimulating regional research cooperation and capacity building through, for example, SPAAR, ASARECA, SACCAR, DHP, PINEP and RPSUD,
 - further developing a programme for research into forests in dryland areas in Africa – FOREP, phase II,
 - supporting institutions that SADC cooperates with, for example the Desert Research Foundation, Namibia,
 - continuing to contribute to the activities and networks of IFS and AAS in dryland areas.
- 3) Sida intends to cooperate with Swedish universities, engaged in dryland areas, by
 - allocating research funds, via Swedish applications, to the research cooperation of Swedish research workers with institutions in dryland areas,

- stimulating the participation of Swedish researchers in the work of the Convention's Committee on Science and Technology.

Cooperation with NGOs

- 1) Sida intends to support a variety of small and large NGOs which work locally and globally with the Convention through
 - continuing to support international NGOs which participate in the international policy debate on the convention, for example IUCN and IIED,
 - working actively to ensure that South-based NGOs working in the spirit of the convention are included among the organisations which receive support via, for example, the North-South programme of the Society for the Conservation of Nature, and Forum Syd.

Internal work

- 1) Sida intends to:
 - make an inventory of the possibilities for, and develop forms for, greater cooperation between the Department for Natural Resources and the Environment and other departments at Sida within the framework of the work on the Convention – with the Department for Research Cooperation in respect of research and capacity development; with the Department for Cooperation with NGOs and Humanitarian Assistance in respect of NGOs and the prevention of natural disasters; with the Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation for the development of trade, small-scale industries, infrastructure, macro-economic issues; and with the Department for Democracy and Social Development in the areas of institution development, local processes and education,
 - inform and train members of staff concerned at Sida, the embassies in developing countries and other partners in cooperation on the Convention and Sida's strategy for working with the Convention,
 - ensure that dryland areas are given greater attention in the development of the resource base, via the services of associate experts, earmarked research funds etc.

Acronyms

AAS	African Academy of Sciences
ASAL	Arid and semi-arid lands
ASARECA	Association for Strengthening of Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
CGIAR	Consultative Group of International Agriculture Research
CIFOR	Centre for International Forestry Research
DESO	Sida's Department for Democracy and Social Development
DHP	Dryland Husbandry Project
EU	European Union
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
FARMESA	Far-level Applied Methods in Easter and Southern Africa
FOREP	Forestry Research Regeneration Programme
FTPP	Forest Trees and People Programme
GWP	Global Water Partnership
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas
ICIPE	International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semiarid Tropics
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFS	International Foundation for Sciences
IIED	Institute for Environment and Development
ILRI	International Livestock Research Centre
INEC	Sida's Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation
INFO	Sida's Information Department
IPGRI	International Plant Genetic Resources Centre
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LAMP	Land management and Environment Programme
NAP	National Action Programme
NATUR	Sida's Department for Natural Resources and the Environment
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PINEP	Pastoral Information Network
RELMA	Regional Land Management Unit
RIP	Regional Indicative Programmes
RPSUD	East African Research Programme on Sustainable Use of Dryland Biodiversity
RSCU	Regional Soil Conservation Unit

SACCAR	Southern Africa Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural and natural Resources Research and Training
SADCELMS	SADC – Environmental and Land Management Sector
SAREC	Sida’s Department for Research Cooperation
SCAFE	Soil Conservation and Agroforestry Extension Programme
SEKA	Sida’s Department for Cooperation with NGOs and Humanitarian Assistance
SPAAR	Special Programme for African Agricultural Research
SPGRC	SADC Regional Plant Genetic Resources Centre
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
WB	World Bank



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