Facilitation Committee[1] of the Global Mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Issues Paper for CSD-12 Side Event
Interlinkages between Drought, Desertification and Water

Drought and desertification threaten the livelihood of over 1 billion people in more than 110 countries around the world.
Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General

Affected Parties of the UNCCD are committed to mitigating the effects of drought at all levels, and to reduce the vulnerability of society and natural systems to drought as it relates to combating desertification.
UN Convention to Combat Desertification

What the facts tell us

The 1999-2001 drought in Kenya cost the economy some 2.5 billion dollars. In China, 22.6 million persons had inadequate drinking water due to drought over the past several years. About 70% of Mongolia is currently suffering from drought. In India, approximately 130,000,000 people (15% of the population) have been exposed to drought over the past two years.

Recurrent drought can reverse national development gains

Drought is not just a drylands issue. In many countries the frequency, duration and severity of drought can impact GDP and can affect investments in national development. For example, in Zimbabwe, the drought of 1990 to 1991 resulted in a 45% drop in agricultural production, a 62%

[1] The Global Mechanism (GM) was established in 1997 under the UNCCD to rationalize the allocation of existing aid to combat land degradation and mobilize additional funding for CCD implementation. The GM is supported in its work by a Facilitation Committee, whose Members are : UNDP (2004 Chair), IFAD, World Bank, UNCCD Secretariat, GEF Secretariat, UNEP, FAO, RDBs and CGIAR. Furthermore, OECD, G77+China, and RIOD participate as Observers.

decline in the value of the stock market, 9% drop in manufacturing output and an 11% drop in the GDP. The economic impacts are also felt in developed countries; for example the drought of 1988 in the US caused an estimated damage of 40 billion dollars due to direct and knock-on effects (Wilhite 1993). The size of the US economy is sufficient to absorb this shock, but what of many LDC's?

Drought is the most important natural hazard facing our world today

UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention & Recovery (BCPR) has found that the single most significant natural hazard worldwide in terms of human mortality is drought. However, countries with the same exposure and same GNP had very different impacts, because the effects of drought can be mediated through a socio-economic system which either increases or decreases vulnerability. The effective interrelationship of governance, participation and growth can collectively help reduce such impacts.

Policy choices either exacerbate vulnerability or enhance resilience to drought

The 1960s were a period of above-average rainfall in the Sahel which encouraged farmers to move into areas which were only suited for, and had traditionally been used for, mobile livestock rearing. This was reinforced by policy, both government and donor. Not surprisingly, when lengthy droughts struck in the 1970s, the consequences on desertification and poverty were far greater than would otherwise have been the case, as the societies had unwittingly increased their exposure to drought and their vulnerability to its impacts. Adapting policy to uncertainty may make the difference between major and minor impacts during a drought.

Drought is situation-specific and must be reflected in planning, research and investments for sustainable land management

Conditions which lead to a 'wheat drought' would not necessarily also cause a 'sheep drought'. It may simply take a change in land use to increase drought resilience even if the severity of the drought does not change. But water and food security are not just technical issues; drought vulnerability is just as much a question of – indeed a test of – governance as it is of the meteorological sciences. At the heart of policy matters are: appropriate land tenure; institutional coherence; and incentives for better governance of land and natural resources. Chronically drought-impacted societies need to put drought near the centre of their sustainable development priorities, or risk reversing development gains in other areas.

Principles for managing uncertainty in drought-prone societies

Principles for drought management should include:

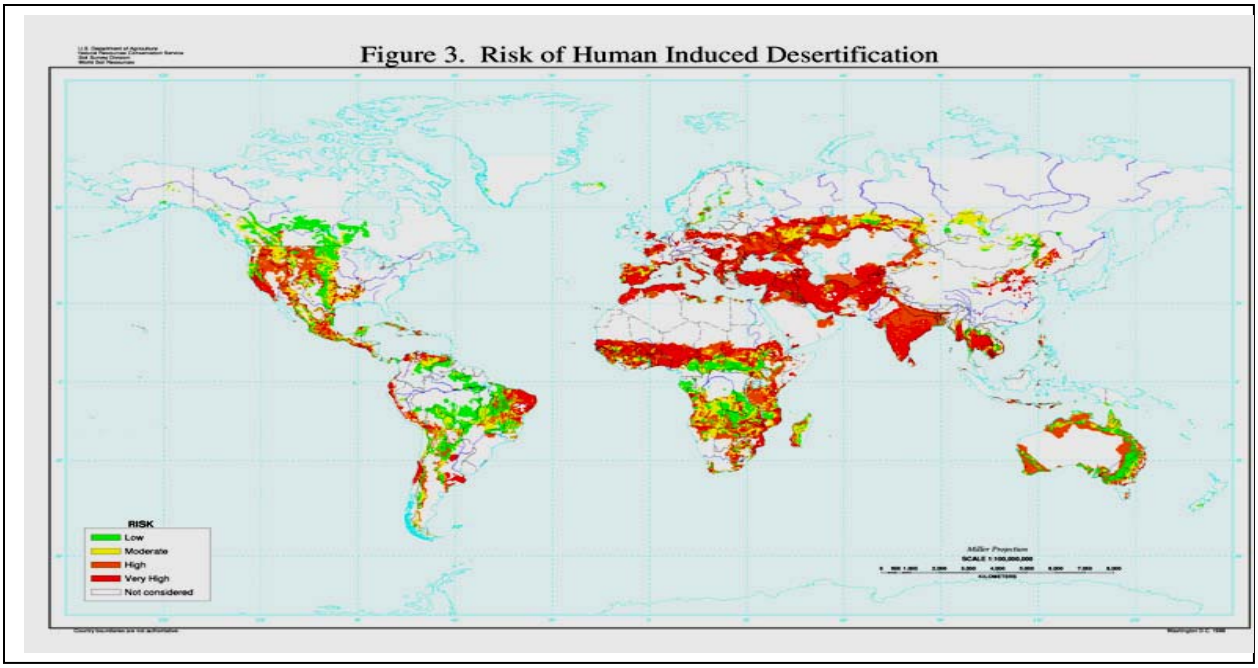
- Change and uncertainty are inevitable
- Management should be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level, so that representatives of affected groups are involved, and all relevant knowledge systems (scientific and indigenous) are considered
- Recognizing that various parts of the society-environment complex operate at different time scales, and with unknown interactions and lag effects, objectives should be set for the long term
- Ecosystems must be managed within the limits of their functioning in order to ensure that they continue to supply services
- The people who live in drought prone areas should be able to avail themselves of all opportunities to develop fully in terms of the modern world and in accordance with human rights

Living with Risk and Investing in Drylands

Within drylands are found many disadvantaged groups such as female-headed households, land-poor farmers and pastoralists. Progress towards the MDGs is slower in drylands than in more favoured environments. Based on their *needs*, dryland peoples deserve more attention, based on their *right* to participate fully in human development, they have a strong claim to more assistance. Based on the global commitment to the MDGs, the number of poor people in drylands, unless reduced, will threaten the achievement of those global goals.

There are more people today who are vulnerable to drought, than there were ten years ago. To live with drought risk, local peoples' livelihoods need to be diverse and "drought-proof", with assets that tide them over a prolonged period of drought, insurance-like schemes to buffer the impacts, and healthy ecosystems that maintain their stability, integrity, functions and services.

There are good examples that investing in dryland development is sound both at micro and macro economic levels and above all in social terms. Therefore the best approach to fighting poverty in drylands and to protect against unsustainable ecosystem management is to promote investments in sustainable and productive land use practices. Bringing added value is the best defence against overexploiting natural capital and fighting poverty.



Desertification is land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, or drylands, resulting from climactic variations and human activities. 12.6 billion acres, 39 percent of the Earth's land surface, are drylands. Nearly 70 percent of drylands are affected by desertification. This is 30 percent of the Earth's total land surface.

AFRICA:
With two-thirds of the continent being desert or drylands and 73 percent of its drylands are already severely or moderately degraded, desertification has its greatest impact in Africa. The most affected areas include the South, the Horn, and the Sahel region, the area stretching from Mauritania to Chad.

ASIA:
Asia contains the largest amount of land affected by desertification. Nearly 3.5 billion acres of land, some 71 percent of its drylands, are moderately or severely degraded. This amounts to one-third of Asia. Most of the affected areas reside within the former Soviet Union.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
Nearly three-quarters of the region's drylands are moderately to severely desertified. Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil and Venezuela are especially affected.

NORTH AMERICA:
74 percent of North American drylands are severely or moderately degraded. Degraded drylands in the United States, largely in the Southwest and Central Mountainous regions, constitute the bulk of lands at risk.

EUROPE:
Almost two-thirds of Europe's drylands are moderately to severely degraded. The problem is particularly acute in the Northern Mediterranean, where rains are highly variable, droughts occur, and the soil is poor.

AUSTRALIA:
Nearly 70 percent of all Australian land is dryland. It is not known how much of this land is degraded.