

## *Sub-Regional Action Programme (SRAP)*

### *Terms of Reference (Explanatory note)*

*The Terms of Reference of a "regional" action programme covering the then member countries of the Group of Annex were adopted at the ministerial level on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 200 in Murcia, Spain. In the meantime, more Northern Mediterranean affected countries became Parties to the UNCCD.*

*At the meeting held in Athens, Greece in July 2001, the then five members of the "Group of Annex IV" (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey) expressed their wish to continue working together as a group. Since this did not involve the most recent Northern Mediterranean Annex IV country Parties, it was decided to rename the working group as the "Subgroup of Annex IV". Therefore the Terms of Reference (TOR) of their Regional Action Programme (RAP) was renamed as the TOR of a Sub Regional Action Programme (SRAP) so as to refer to their work at sub-regional level.*

*Group of Annex IV Countries*

TERMS OF REFERENCE  
of the  
Regional Action Programme

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## Background

1. During the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committees sessions of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the regional implementation annex for the Northern Mediterranean, so-called Annex IV was the last annex of the UNCCD to be negotiated. This annex has been successively chaired by Spain, Portugal and Italy.
2. The Annex IV for the Northern Mediterranean offers to the current countries of the group - Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey - a framework for mutual co-operation and more effective national action. Other countries in the region are expected to join soon. In addition to intra-regional co-operation, this Annex calls in its article 10 on the co-ordination with other sub-regions and regions stressing that "sub-regional, regional and joint action programmes in the northern Mediterranean region may be prepared and implemented in collaboration with those of other sub-regions or regions, particularly with those of the sub-region of northern Africa".
3. The RAP will be developed, as stated by article 11 of the convention, to contribute "to harmonise, complement and increase the efficiency of national programmes" of member countries of Annex IV. In identifying objectives and activities must be taken in mind the unique characteristics of the Mediterranean basin involving countries belonging to three different annexes of UNCCD. Therefore the RAP is open to possible co-ordination with the Regional or Sub-regional Action Programmes promoted by country Parties of other Annexes.
4. Regional Annex IV follows the general disposition of the Convention with regard to action programme. The article 15 on regional implementation annexes specifies that "elements for incorporation in action programmes shall be selected and adapted to the socio-economic, geographical and climatic factors applicable to affected country Parties or regions, as well as to their level of development".

## Main issues concerning desertification in the Northern Mediterranean

5. The Northern Mediterranean countries are faced with environmental crises, with problems linked to climatic issues and with the no longer sustainable exploitation of natural resources. According to article 2 of the annex IV, the particular conditions of the northern Mediterranean region include:
  - semi-arid climatic conditions affecting large areas, seasonal droughts, very high rainfall variability and sudden and high-intensity rainfall;
  - poor and highly erodible soils, prone to develop surface crusts;
  - uneven relief with steep slopes and very diversified landscapes;
  - extensive forest coverage losses due to frequent wildfires;
  - crisis conditions in traditional agriculture with associated land abandonment and deterioration of soil and water conservation structures;

- unsustainable exploitation of water resources leading to serious environmental damage, including chemical pollution, salinization and exhaustion of aquifers; and
  - concentration of economic activity in coastal areas as a result of urban growth, industrial activities, tourism and irrigated agriculture.
6. The Northern Mediterranean region is a complex mosaic of diversified landscapes. It has been settled and cultivated for millennia by various cultures and civilisations. Much of the region is semi-arid and subject to seasonal droughts, high rainfall variability, or sudden intense downpours. It is also marked by high population densities, heavy concentrations of industry, and intensive agriculture in the coastal and flat areas. Less favoured areas are, on the other side, characterised by depopulation and abandonment of productive activities. Although people here often use the term "desert", they do so in the sense of desertion that is of wilderness, lack of population, or isolation.
  7. Mediterranean land degradation is often linked to poor agricultural practices. Soils become salinized, dry, sterile, unproductive and unprotected in response to a combination of natural hazards - droughts, floods, forest fires - and human-controlled activities - notably over-tilling irrational irrigation and overgrazing. Fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation, contamination by heavy metals, and the introduction of exotic (invasive) plant species is undermining the long-term health of the region's soils. Physical changes imposed on watercourses by the construction of reservoirs, the canalisation of rivers, and the drainage of wetlands are affecting land quality. Meanwhile, groundwater levels are declining widely, resulting among other things in salt-water intrusion into coastal aquifers. Some 80% of the region's available freshwater is used for irrigation.
  8. The continuing growth of industry, tourism, intensive agriculture, and other economic activities along the coastlines is placing particular stress on coastal areas. On the other hand the abandonment of land, particularly on marginal and easily eroded hillsides, weakened agricultural planning and land management.
  9. The situation has been aggravated by the social and economic crisis less of industrialised areas where, in recent years, under the pressure of globalisation of economy many productive activities lost their local markets contributing to the generation of migration fluxes from rural to urban areas.
  10. In the Mediterranean the development of the desertification process is in direct relationship with the crisis of urban centres where the traditional arrangement of the landscape made up of natural houses built with a low consumption of resources has been cast aside in favour of a model based on the massive building, energy waste and environment pollution. The increase of urban centres, the increase of products demand and the consumer goods cause the abandonment of traditional farming systems and the introduction of new methods and agricultural policies based on mono-cropping. The uprooting, the lost or the redefinition of elderly people or women's roles who own the knowledge entail the loss of management capabilities as for resources and traditional knowledge.

#### Aims, approach and purposes of the Regional Action Programme (RAP)

##### 11. The RAP aims to:

- promote the acceptance and the compliance of values and principles for the preservation of environment and soil, water and biotic resources and the consciousness that advancement of

desertification can, in many cases, be stopped and reversed by means of proper policies and interventions.

- harmonise national action programmes of Country Parties of the Annex IV and to improve their co-ordination in combating desertification.

- provide information to European Commission to assist in the identification of priority issues and the development of environmental and structural policies for the Mediterranean region.

- set up a network that will help regional and local authorities affected by specific problems to establish international partnerships for prevention or mitigation projects eligible for funding by the European Commission.

12. The article 7 of Annex IV gives some guidelines on the preparation and the implementation of the RAP to:

- identify, in co-operation with national institutions, national objectives related to desertification which can better be met by such programmes and relevant activities which could be effectively carried out through them;

- evaluate the operational capacities and activities of relevant regional, sub-regional and national institutions;

- assess existing programmes related to desertification among Parties of the region and their relationship with national action programmes.

13. The RAP should establish and exploit the synergies with all relevant international initiatives and treaties, at Mediterranean, European and International level as well as research programmes assessing the climatic and human impact on land and soil degradation in the region.

14. The RAP should make evident the regional relevance of the issues addressed by the respective National Action Programmes, demonstrate the Pan-European impacts of desertification in southern territories of the continent and establish synergies to raise funds at European level. As Mediterranean region is an ecosystem, the Parties of annex IV should identify the most important issues to increase the attention given to desertification issues in the Mediterranean basin in the agenda of the European institutions.

15. The methods and the strategies proposed by the RAP will be tested and validated in the sensitive areas through the implementation of pilot projects connected by a network that will ensure the exchange of the experiences, data and information.

16. For these purposes, the Annex IV Country Parties of UNCCD need to identify the most relevant transnational topics to be considered in the elaboration of the RAP. It is essential to carry out concrete measures, by way of a regional programme, that will allow a co-ordinated enforcement of regional, national and local policies. This will contribute to monitor environmental and socio-economic aspects for a sustainable development of the Northern Mediterranean countries in relation with other countries of the Mediterranean Basin.

17. Relevant transnational topics to combat desertification in the Northern Mediterranean are related to:

- a) Most sensitive areas in terms of desertification hazard;
- b) Common regional benchmark and indicators for processes and mitigation
- c) Collection, analysis, and exchange of technical and scientific data;

- d) Exchange of data and information;
- e) Involvement of the civil society within the RAP process;
- f) Traditional knowledge and practices safeguarding the quality of the Northern Mediterranean landscape
- g) Connection with other existing regional and sub-regional initiatives

The objectives and expected results of proposed activities to be undertaken in each transnational topics would be the following:

**a) Most sensitive areas in terms of desertification hazard**

- Objectives :

- (i) improve understanding of causes and effects of desertification and critically review methods and approach employed until now ;
- (ii) to favour the application of the precautionary principle in all policies taking into account possible long term effects due to the fragility of environment in the areas affected by drought and desertification.
- (iii) to promote and integrate the identification of most sensitive areas to actual and potential desertification, drought and land degradation.
- (iv) to support the monitoring, under common procedures, of the actions undertaken by NAPs in the most sensitive areas affected by desertification.
- (v) to improve the knowledge about the different aspects involving desertification in the Northern Mediterranean Region including biophysical, socio-economic and traditional aspects.

- Expected results :

- (i) a common approach based on the existing knowledge about the most relevant environmental and socio-economic parameters;
- (ii) identify areas that need the development of pro-active drought contingency planning which includes water management, legislations, participation and training, EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment), emergency response programmes.
- (iii) to promote sustainable management practices and protect the areas susceptible to desertification.
- (iv) Identify the rural communities affected by the desertification hazard in sensitive areas, that need assistance and the development of sustainable means and programmes
- (v) to promote programmes that involve the rural communities and NGOs in affected and sensitive areas

**b) Common regional benchmark and indicators for processes and mitigation**

- Objectives :

- (i) testing agreed preventive and mitigating practices and policies in a regional network of selected pilot areas;
- (ii) to propose the suitable instruments and systems for the production of adequate information for planning needs ;
- (iii) to evaluate the extent and severity of desertification at regional level, using agreed criteria and definition in assessing ;

- (iv) to evaluate in the pilot areas by means of monitoring the evolution of desertification processes both the environmental and social impact of the European Commission policies and the implementation of the Regional Action Programme.

- Expected results :

- (i) a regional network for planning needs to combat desertification in the Annex IV Member Countries of UNCCD, taking into account the Mediterranean Basin context;
- (ii) benchmark and indicators for measuring the progress of the fight against desertification at national and regional level to implement Action Programmes;
- (iii) environmental and socio-economic indicators to monitor the application and the efficiency of European Commission policies.
- (iv) better definition of the participation indicators of different sectors, mainly the of NGOs and rural communities.

**c) The collection and analysis of technical and scientific data**

- Objectives :

- (i) to increase co-ordination of the collection and analysis of relevant information inside the Annex IV and also with countries of the region outside the Annex IV;
- (ii) to provide continuous communications between producers and users of scientific and technical data and results by means of periodical meetings of a regional panel of experts;
- (iii) to provide a framework to develop technical and scientific co-operation into the causes of land degradation and socio-economic desertification issues at the regional level;
- (iii) to ensure the systematic observation of land degradation in an effort to better understand and assess the processes and effects of drought and desertification, taking into account local communities and non-governmental organisations engagement ;

- Expected results :

- (i) a regional desertification «observatories network»
- (ii) to explore the synergy between the «observatories network» and the «pilot areas network»
- (iii) an increase of knowledge of the desertification hazard and mitigation;
- (iv) improvement of data quality and management;
- (v) contribution toward data interpretation;
- (vi) fostering the involvement of the local groups in setting research priorities.

**d) The exchange of data and information**

- Objectives :

- (i) to propose appropriate mechanisms by which every country involved should contribute to the management, exchange and dissemination of relevant information at regional level according to the UNCCD provisions for data accessibility;
- (ii) to promote the data and information exchange among the countries with the EEA and other relevant institutions and organisations within the Mediterranean basin;
- (iii) to facilitate accessibility of data and information for affected sectors, mainly for local communities and NGOs and favour constant circulation of information at all levels.
- (iv) to facilitate and promote access and circulation of data and information among stakeholders and various existing network at regional level;

- (v) promote the effective availability and accessibility of data and information among the countries for the development of the implementation of policy principles and mitigating practices.

- Expected results :

- (i) a Regional Clearing House Mechanism for the exchange, harmonisation and dissemination of information related to dry-lands protection and management issues at the national, sub-regional and regional levels ;
- (ii) a follow-up of the evolution of desertification and of the efficiency of policies applied and actions being taken at national and regional levels.
- (iii) new initiatives of cooperation in the field of information, and especially reinforce agricultural information services & NGOs in building collective capacities.
- (iv) the dissemination of existing results in the field of integrated & sustainable management of natural resources, including agricultural and pastoral land, the plant cover, water resources, biological diversity.
- (v) a more efficient communication and participation between local communities and different NGOs networks

**e) The involvement of civil society and local authorities within the RAP process**

- Objectives :

- (i) to promote the perception and understanding of the civil society on:  
the possibility of reversing desertification,  
the regional causes, processes and effects of desertification and drought,  
the need of protecting the marginal lands,  
the regional relationship between desertification and population shifting,  
the social and economic consequences of desertification and drought crises at transnational and regional levels and the need for common approaches in facing it;
- (ii) to promote the use of participatory approaches & methods at local level.
- (iii) to promote the development of regional way and means (participatory approaches, tools, guidelines, methodologies, products, etc.) to inform and build capacities for the civil society (NGO's, youth, farmers and women organisations) and local authorities to participate to the RAP processes.
- (iv) to promote local community participation in the process of definition of the RAP, taking in the account the local experiences to combat desertification.

- Expected results :

- (i) increase of the knowledge of desertification causes and effects and feasibility of the mitigation actions;
- (ii) to foster partnerships around common projects where local authorities and civil society can identify actions to protect environment and affected population.
- (iii) facilitation of application of sustainable technology of land use.
- (iv) increase of public awareness via the involvement of local authorities & NGOs in the RAP process



**f) The traditional knowledge and practices safeguarding the quality of Northern Mediterranean landscape**

Objectives :

- (i) to implement the wide range of solution offered by traditional techniques renewed and adjusted by modern technology ;
- (ii) to promote in the rural areas the consideration of the agriculture, forestry and pastoralism not as simple production systems but as an integral part of sustainable land use system; these activities can be sustainable thanks to the integration with other economies like cultural tourism, archaeology and the use of the environment.
- (iii) to develop urban areas within the frame of sustainable ecosystems that contribute to the welfare to human societies and other life forms.

- Expected results :

- (i) to use, in a different way, those funds that can cause soil degradation, dangerous landscape changes and the destruction of local knowledge;
- (ii) to foster the traditional systems of water production, harvesting and distribution;
- (iii) to foster traditional practices for integrated cycle production organisation;
- (iv) to foster the systems of integration among the segments of the urban cycles (production, consumption and wastes);
- (v) to involve the population by highlighting the roles of elderly people, women, children and marginal strata of society establishing territorial networks between municipalities, territorial pacts, communities and parks.

**h) *Connection with other existing regional and sub-regional initiatives***

Objectives :

- (i) to promote synergies between the implementation of UNCCD AND UNFCCC, UNCBD and other initiatives such as Barcelona Convention, Agenda MED 21/MCSD, etc., related to the Mediterranean.
- (ii) to propose the establishment of inter-regional actions to favour synergies among the Annex IV (Northern Mediterranean) and Northern Africa and Eastern mediterranean Action Programmes.

- Expected results :

- (i) better exchanges on national policies to combat drought and desertification between regional annexes at Mediterranean level,
- (ii) **to increase** regional & decentralized cooperation through different projects by local authorities, NGOs and rural communities