

The challenge of implementing UNCCD policies in Afghanistan, a country under reconstruction

C. Bigot, Wageningen University, Master International Land and Water Management, *Land Degradation & Development specialization*



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Background

The **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** has the objective to create a global framework to develop sustainable land management in order to reverse and prevent desertification/ land degradation, and mitigate the effects (7).

In Afghanistan, conflicts have exacerbated land degradation and desertification risks (9). In 1995, Afghanistan ratified the UNCCD. During this period Taliban were enhancing their power, and conflicts were occurring through the whole country (3). Taliban captured Kabul in 1996. Later, in 2001, the Taliban regime collapsed after UN armed intervention (3). Since elections in 2004 and 2009, Hamid Karzai has led the Afghan government (3). Despite UNCCD requirements, no National Action Plan (NAP) has yet been completed (8).



Figure 1. Afghanistan

Objective

The objective of this research is to discuss the achievements and the issues related to the implementation of UNCCD in Afghanistan, after 2001, in a post-conflict context.

Results

Achievements at political level

The main institutions for the implementation of UNCCD include NEPA (National Environmental Protection Agency), MAIL (Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock), and ANDS (Afghanistan National Development Strategy) (8).

According to the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) Afghanistan is currently taking actions to fulfill obligations under UNCCD. A project (2007) supported by UNDP and GEF (Global Environment Facility), includes the objective to achieve **NAP**, through different phases of development (8). NAP will be "cross cutting in nature and will link with sustainable rural livelihoods, poverty reduction mechanisms and quality of life issues (8)."

Furthermore, MAIL is trying to raise funds for implementing projects supporting UNCCD and it has recently established Community Based Programs on resource management and desertification (4).

Achievements at local level

Projects implementing UNCCD, under the responsibility and help of the government and NGOs (4), are focusing on different issues, such as *Dune stabilization, Reforestation and Scientific Research*.

Dune stabilization

Dunes have been destroyed during the war (6). The objective of the project "Prevention from Desertification" in Balkh, Jawozian, Fara, and Helmand is to reconstruct and stabilize dunes in order to prevent damages of agricultural lands and cities (6).

Reforestation

The Afghan NGO SDO is carrying out a reforestation project in Heart province. Starting the project, the NGO, the governor and local people faced financial, political, ethnic and land rights problems. Currently the project is running and it will be assessed in few years (5; 4).

Scientific research

Recently, study on drought resistant crops and irrigated cultures have been carried out by MAIL with Italian help (1).



Figure 2. Reforestation in Ghoryan district, Heart, Afghanistan (5).



Figure 3. The trees after 6 months in Ghoryan district, Heart, Afghanistan (5).

Issues of the Afghan context

Post-conflict context

The powerful warlords implement their own laws on natural resources management (and break the grazing management law) and constitute an "alternate state" within the state (2; 4). This, and corruption, makes that the government in Kabul often cannot reach the local level (1; 2; 4). Furthermore, conflicts still occur with the Taliban who contest the government and do not want to collaborate with NGOs (5). According to the different local contacts (1; 4), opinions differ on the priority of desertification and land degradation in Afghan policy. Moreover due to war and conflicts, people are not enough aware of desertification and land degradation issues (4; 5).

Lack of resources

Implementation of local projects often faces lack of funding and trained people at district and province level (4).

Land rights and energy problem

Unclear land rights and high wood needs for cooking and heating hamper sustainable land management (4; 5).

Conclusion

The implementation of UNCCD in Afghanistan is facing lack of financial and human resources, insecurity (conflicts), weak governance, energy issues and unclear land rights.

Solving energy problems should get a high priority by the government. Access to electricity in the whole country would considerably decrease wood needs and enable people to adopt sustainable land management practises. Furthermore government should allocate resources to control implementation of the *Grazing Management Law*.

Moreover coordination and cooperation between organisations working on land management and desertification should be enhanced. Projects should be linked with governmental policy and national development plan.

Nevertheless, the Afghan institutions in charge to implement UNCCD are aware that desertification is a complex problem and solving involves many inter-related components.

Despite many limiting factors, political willingness and local involvement are a reality, predicting improvements on the long-term, especially a bottom-up approach through Community Based Programs looks promising.

To conclude, in my opinion, government should especially give priority to develop electricity access in the whole country in order to enable sustainable land management.

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