

Forum
international

Désertif'Actions

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Introduction to topic 3 for the workshops of the 21st and 22nd of september

Combating desertification : getting out of the beaten track

The « Desertif-Actions » Forum is a meeting between civil society organizations operating in arid areas within the framework of the CCD and other multilateral agreements with a view to a fruitful exchange on the importance of the work to be undertaken in arid areas for the benefit of a large spectrum of NGOs, local Governments, international institutions and the private sector.

To this end, the Forum has three objectives, including that of securing the embodiment of the role of civil society organizations and their national /international networks in a strategy. The recommendations should contribute to the preparation of a “Montpellier Appeal for arid areas” which will also include taking a stand on the value of arid areas and their importance for the mode of life of numerous populations, as well as a strategy for a clear involvement of organizations of the civil society. The appeal will be among other things, presented to the conference of Heads of States and Governments to be held in October 2006 in Algeria.

« Desertif-Actions » falls within the framework of the international year of deserts and desertification and is aimed at getting out of the beaten track by linking the action to combat desertification to a mobilization approach.

« Desertif-Actions » is a follow up to the appeal launched in favour of an increased support for the implementation of the United Nations Convention of the Control of desertification, at the last global summit on sustainable development held in Johannesburg, which opens the way for a renewed mobilization of actors of the civil society. The idea, on the occasion of this Montpellier international meeting is to adopt a strategy of the civil society organization for the next three years and to include in a long term action plan

Indeed, during the decade following the ratification of the Convention, the countries concerned strove to prepare and implement some national programmes of actions (NPAs), as well as some sub regional and regional programmes of action for the control of desertification. The cross-evaluation of the process of preparation and implementation of these plans of actions through various organs and groups of actors, makes it possible to highlight the relatively important achievements in terms of the enforcement of the principles of participation and partnership, on which the spirit of the convention is based.

For example, organizations of the civil society are seen to have recognized the role of the central actors of programmes of action to combat desertification, at the national, sub region and regional levels. This, in itself, marks the promotion of democratic governance. Another original and interesting characteristic of the convention is that it includes any environment

based activity in development logic and makes it the lynchpin of a profound change in the methods of conducting development and cooperation policies.

Civil Society: an Actor or beneficiary?

CCD offers a formidable and rare opportunity for the participation of the civil society. But everything happens as if there were two strong categories of actors who engage in this branch first by individual interest and who do not aim in reality at the well-being of those on whose behalf they talk by discouraging furthermore, those imbued with goodwill. On the other hand, some actors convinced that their unique and acceptable right to life and difficulty in living are sufficient arguments for influencing decisions

Neither of these two categories is in a position to secure the advancement of things with their own methods. It is undoubtedly the combination of their respective interests that makes it possible to find the ways and means to build a civil society force more capable of being heard.

In reality, up to now, a process relating to the environment and development, has rarely brought together as many categories of civil society actors as these and made possible such a level of political dialogue. But these achievements cannot conceal insufficiencies affecting the very foundations on which the actual implementation of the advocated activities rest. There is notably a gap between the extent of the phenomenon of desertification and the limited scope of the activities undertaken, to date, by the different groups of actors and between the low level of mobilization of the actors of the civil society, compared with place accorded them as full-fledged partners of public authorities. Indeed, the commitment of actors of the civil society to the control of desertification has drawn level with the mobilization observed regarding other conventions of Rio on bio-diversity and climat. The mobilization of the "seven Sisters"- in reference to the biggest non governmental organizations of the North, all involved in the climate and bio-diversity conventions – has not materialized hitherto, although it was targeted from the beginning. Aside from a few organizations of the North which have understood the scope, the network of actors of the civil society involved in the implementation of the desertification Convention, come from the South.

Ten years after the entry into force of CCD, the time has come to take stock of events. The meeting wishes to go beyond the presentation of case studies on the stakes and successes. This is why there have been preparatory discussions: e-forum, contributions (two pagers). These different exchanges make it possible to raise a certain number of questions which will be useful in the deepening of the issue. The list below goes over all the questions raised hitherto.

Indicative questions as inputs for the debate

The indicative list of questions is proposed in order to facilitate inspiration, but also and above all, to refresh the memory of all those involved with a view to a rich debate in terms of ideas. The idea being that, at the end of this meeting some relevant recommendations would be put forward in order to secure a clear definition of the subject in its totality.

1. How was this convention prepared and implemented and what was the role of the civil society ? was it considered an alibi or a pretext to import participatory character to the design and implementation of CDD? Have the Civil society organizations of the South and the North been only opportunistic, by positioning themselves in order to capture the financing drawn from CDD or have they been really aware of the need to get organized and t have their voice heard within the framework of CDD?

2. Has the participation of NGOs/OCBs made it really possible to strengthen the capacities of the organizations or has it only made it possible to secure the travel of the NGO /OCB elite? How has it influenced the taking into account of government positions?
3. What can be the best strategy for the mobilization of NGO of the North?
4. How is it possible to act in concert with such organizations as Cari, Both Ends, etc. which are already operating for the benefit of the European civil society, to succeed in **mobilizing the largest NGOs of the North « the Seven Sisters »** bearing in mind that the latter have been the subject of several appeals from NGOs of the South to show increasing interest in desertification?
5. Is it necessary to revitalize the already existing networks such as RIOD, by rethinking their content and prerogatives for a more efficient enforcement of the activities envisaged by the conventions?
6. Is it not worth creating in the countries, some contractual executives where each category of actors (Civil Society, State, Private etc .) pledges to undertake activities for which it has a comparative advantage ? in other words, how can the convention be brought down to the level of local communities?
7. Should organizations of the civil society operating in the field of desertification now direct their efforts towards the establishment of a long lasting framework of action and consultation?
8. What should be done bearing in mind that migration problems are partly linked to the drastic reduction of natural resources and the de-structuring of the economy of arid zones?
9. Will the revitalization of the civil society be achieved through the strengthening of existing conventions frameworks at the national level in relation to the coordination of the different NGOs OCBs , civil society and local communities ?
10. What lobbying is required for the direct financing of NGOs by donors?
11. How can the control of desertification be elevated to the level of the priorities of the international community (G8, MULTILATERAL AGENCIES, COOUNTRIES OF THE South, etc?)
12. How is it possible to achieve the recognition by the international community of the close interdependence between the control of desertification, migratory movements, the achievements of the Millennium development goals and poverty control, etc.
13. Do the strategies currently used by the civil society in your region seem appropriate to you?
14. What strategy should be put in place to (re) mobilize organizations of the civil society, in general, for the actual implementation of the convention on desertification?
15. What could be the role of these organizations in the materialization of their respective networks and the international community, etc?
16. How is the control of desertification viewed or considered in your region, to what extent does this perspective promote or not promote the commitment of actors of the civil society, private sector, etc?
17. What are the activities deemed « priority » in your region for improving the living conditions of local communities confronted with the phenomenon of land degradation?
18. How are the social organization of your region investing themselves in the actions to combat desertification ?
19. By what means or strategy is it possible to (re) organize the networks of social sectors engaged in desertification control activities, in order to make their activities more concerted and more efficient?
20. What else should be envisaged?

Synopsis of questions prepared by
 Fatou Faye, Masse LO
 Enda-Lead