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Eco has been published by Non-Governmental Groups at major international conferences since the Stockholm Environment Conference in 1972. This issue is produced co-operatively by groups attending the UNCCD COP 8 in Madrid, September 2007



The Civil Society Says Come to Point and Take Action

We attended the COP 8 official inauguration yesterday. For two days before, the civil society delegates had been working hard to share information and to identify their priorities, to reach a consensus positions. One thing that was shared between all Civil Society representatives was an absolute sensation of frustration. From each region, despite the particular problems in each country, this feeling was a constant in each of the NGOs. Frustration to realize that years have passed without advances. Frustration to see the total disconnection between declarations of governments intentions and the reality on the ground. Frustration at the absence of results. And also annoyance. Civil society is annoyed with its governments because it understands that

although solutions to problems exists, the lack of political will means that they have not been solved. And meanwhile, more poverty, more environmental refugees, more environmental deterioration... Civil society is tired to hope. And yesterday it went onto the street, into the open, in front of the meeting rooms of NN UU, to say enough!! to say that the governments through their inaction are accomplices of the advance of desertification. A convention without action causes desertificación!

We need to take action urgently. Civil society knows where the problems are. It was clear last weekend in Madrid, during pre-COP. But it lacks the power to negotiate in the CCD. A Convention that does not provide the spaces

Lutter contre la désertification, est lutter contre la pauvreté

On a fait un entretien à Aldrin Calixte, secrétaire exécutif de HAITI SURVIE, NGO de Haïti, membre aussi de la FOE- Friend of The Earth-, participant dans plusieurs COP et participant cette année dans la COP8.

Pour lui, la participation dans les COP suppose une façon de partager des expériences entre les ONGs, d'agir ensemble, de trouver un partenaire et d'être des lobbies pour un but final: agir contre la désertification et dégradation de la terre.

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and mechanisms so that the NGOs is represented and where they can speak as equal to equal to the responsible politicians, is a convention that works behind the backs of society. Therefore, the NGOs unanimously demand urgent change of direction. Looking at the progress achieved thus far, you may be forgiven for believing that this was COP1 of the CCD, and not the eighth meeting.

The moment has arrived to begin to work. There is an urgent need for additional resources. Authentic participation of Civil society is imperative. And it is necessary to see ambitious, clear and measurable targets. We must rethink and reform the structures and the operation of the convention to make them operational and realistic. And we must do it now. If these changes are made, the Civil society will be there to support the CCD and their governments all the way! □

Transparency on Decision Making Processes at the Convention

Interview to Patrice Burger, Director of CARI

Mr. Patrice Burger, director of the French organization CARI (Centre of International Actions and Realizations, Centre d'Actions et de Réalisations Internationales), gives us his opinion about the lack of transparency at the Convention on decision making and election of executive secretary.

Patrice Burger gets astonished by the fact that NGOs could still not intervene on the most relevant meetings after so many years of Convention. NGOs stand as the voice of local communities inside countries, by the side of affected as well as donors, and if the necessity for "participation" mentioned on more than 20 articles is so, this situation has to change: we cannot leave the making of decisions to 1 or 2 persons. Patrice says about civil society: "We are allowed to be observers, but we cannot intervene on the making of any decision. Precisely Spain has never allowed appointing any NGOs representative at the official delegation, which is incredible being a democracy"

What is also true is that the participation of NGOs is decreasing throughout

the years. The fact of being dependant on donors' contributions to attend international assemblies turns the initial 300 there were at the beginning, to over 70 in this pre-COP8. As a result of these years, we should have a structured work, when we actually do not. This is the basis for our correct management. How we can attend the Convention without having agreed our commitments? How we can achieve this task on the early days previous to the Convention?

In some occasions, it has happened that any national NGO is so lack of funds, that they have attended an international assembly and have assumed global decisions intending to apply them locally, which clearly does not work. This could be an issue to sort out by Northern NGOs, which indeed have worked on the points to be raised on the Convention due to their highest economical power. Precisely Africa urgently needs to work in a network and in a united way.

With regards to the Executive Secretary of the Convention, his appointment bears with a clear lack of trans-

parency, of participation (not because we did not want to), and of common and agreed election criteria. Being his capacity of decision making so important, it is clear to be very necessary and intelligent to stand certain criteria to get an opened and transparent election.

Likewise, Patrice Burger believes all commitments made after the convention to be null by the donors' side and too weak for the affected ones. We have to seek the real interest lying on donors to eradicate desertification. In our analysis, we tend almost not to connect desertification problem with many others: migrations, growing social insecurity, expenses- more than 42 million of dollars per year in problems related with desertification, which for many countries implies their annual GDP, etc.

Another point to bear in mind is the lack of direction on CST (Technology and Science Committee), that so far has never produced anything that helped us to go on; they remain lost. Patrice believes they need something like IPCC (Intergovernmental panel of climate change). □

Africa: desertification and degradation of climate

The conclusion of the Fourth evaluation report of the IPCC in 2007 identifies Africa as one of the regions in the world most vulnerable to the climate changes due to its weak economic situation and its scanty investment level. The economy of this region, essentially agricultural, undergoes heavy constraints such as droughts and desertification which constitute a serious handicap for a sustainable development. These constraints are translated into a severe degradation of soils, more and more precarious population's life conditions, a decrease in the production capacity of soils and a decline in the forestry and biodiversity trainings. Each year the soil degradation costs Sub-Saharan Africa more than 3% of its agricultural GDP, if we believe a study by the World Bank.

Soil degradation reduces the food security and the revenues of rural populations thus keeping the vicious circle of poverty and degradation of natural resources. The climate variability, which is one of the main causes of annual fluctuations of agricultural production, adds up to this. According to a FAO study made in 1996, the decrease in cereal production is more important in developing countries, where it reaches 10% in average. The prolonged reduction of cereal production will have fatal consequences for African populations, in particular for those situated South of Sahara, where agriculture under the rain is prevailing.

The impacts of environmental changes are also sensed in other sectors such as the water resources, human health, forest resources, etc. In West Africa for example countries share surface water resources concentrated in the heart of certain mountainside basins such as those in Senegal, Gambia, Niger, Volta and the Tchad lake. Certain studies accord to recognize that, since the 70's, the outflows have decreased by 30 to 60% according to the mountainside basins.

Following the example of the inter-

national community congregated in Rio de Janeiro for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development, African countries committed to adopt the Climate, Biodiversity and Desertification conventions in order to find the right answers to these environmental problems. These agreements taken from the "Earth Summit" are not only environmental proposals, but they are also and most of all binding international compromises with specific objectives concerning the integration of environment protection and natural resources management in macro-economic planning.

Being particularly affected by desertification, countries in the region have invested, for years, in the making processes and implementation of the action programmes for fighting against desertification at national, sub-regional and regional level (NAP, SRAP, RAP). These processes have allowed carrying out various initiatives for the attenuation of the effects of droughts and for the consolidation of survival strategies of local communities confronted to soil degradation. This mainly consists on:

- Agricultural production is a major constituent of food security. Given the alimentary problems which arid land's populations often encounter, countries have developed agricultural policies based on the improvement of local varieties (cowpea, sorghum, etc.), the increase in the productivity of stockbreeding, market gardening and the command on irrigation.

- It should be emphasized that Africa, particularly Western Africa, has an important water system: the Senegal river (1700 km), the Niger (4200 km), the Tchad lake (25 000 km²) etc. to promote irrigation.

- Conservation and protection of natural resources, through tree plantation (which can be used at the same time as windbreakers, firewood and for-

age crop for animals), the reforestation and valorisation of medicinal plants, the communitarian management of forest and the sale of harvests, etc.

- The management of water resources: certain affected countries have developed mobilisation and water resources management strategies and programmes in the framework of agricultural development, soil regeneration and poverty reduction policies. The accomplishments have meant the promotion of hydro-agricultural settlements, water reserves planning, the installation of drop-by-drop irrigation systems, etc.

- Setting up of information systems, promotion of environmental education and population awareness on the demands of their environment and the reinforcement of local population's capacities contribute as well to a better environmental management.

- The rational use of energy: the increase in the energy demand from biomass in the concerned countries and the price raise of butane gas generate a strong pressure over forestry resources. Likewise, the weak evolution of the energy use techniques, notably of wood-energy, and sustainable development stakes lead certain countries to adopt energy policies which support the use of renewable energies and or alternatives, amongst others, for lighting (solar energy) and water pumping (wind energy).

These activities conducted in the framework of the fight against desertification can contribute amongst others, to attenuate the climate changes by carbon kidnapping and to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, with a better access to renewable energies. They correspond in a great part to the priority activities identified in the national adaptation action programmes (NAAP) to respond the urgent and immediate needs and concerns in the less developed countries (LDC) to adapt to the fatal effects of the climate change. These are essentially the

sectors related to water resources, food security, arid land's ecosystems, forestry and coastal zones.

It is difficult, nowadays, to dissociate the fight against desertification from the adaptation to climate change and know how to fight against the fatal effects of the climate change through urgent actions aimed to improve the water resource management, forest and coasts and food security, in the less developed countries, mainly situated in Africa.

The necessities expressed by the concerned countries through the NAAP and the NAP bring to light the common priority domains and the need for a concerted implementation of these programmes to make an authentic perspective of sustainable development emerge. It comes down to the countries themselves to find the suitable policies and mechanisms at national level for these programmes to be subject to a concerted or combined implementation in order to avoid the duplication of efforts and to reinforce the collaboration amongst the different stakeholders and institutions involved in the implementation of actions engaged to the Convention level.

Likewise, considering the current level of implementation of « climate » and « desertification » conventions in Africa, the NAAP should reinforce or re-launch the activities already started in the framework of the NAP. Such a measure would contribute, without any doubt, to answer more efficiently and with the existing financial means, to the needs of the poorest populations living in the arid lands where the means of subsistence are directly linked to natural resources. □

Emmanuel S. Seck
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Environment Development ENDA

**The NGOs are
meeting every day
at 8:00 in the NGOs
room (G035)**

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Quel est le but de cette COP8?

Pour moi- répond Aldrin- le but es de mettre en oeuvre les engagements de ces années passées, la COP 8 doit être une COP de décision. Pour mettre en oeuvre la convention il faut du financement. Il y a plein d'engagements sur la désertification, mais c'est le temps de les mettre en oeuvre. Mais pour mettre en oeuvre la Convention il faut un financement et il y a un manque de ressources. Donc il n'y a pas de moyen de les mettre en pratique.

Le problème principal- ajoute-t-il, est la limitation financière. D'autres conventions comme celles du changement climatique ou celle de la biodiversité ont un budget beaucoup plus haut que celui de la désertification... Je pense que ça se passe car plusieurs pays pensent que la désertification est un problème régional, quand la réalité est que la désertification est un problème global. La perte de sol, l'augmentation de la désertification, augmente les problèmes de migration à niveau mondial, ce qui suppose un problème à tous les pays. Tous les pays doivent prendre conscience que c'est un problème global.

Il faut donc- ajoute- il- augmenter les ressources de cette convention.

On lui demande quelles sont les actions que les ONGs peuvent faire pour éviter la désertification, la perte de sol fertile.

Dans le cas de Haïti, répond Aldrin, notre NGO, Haïti survie, fait des actions comme la sensibilisation, formation, actions de protection du sol.

Il faut -ajoute- t-il, augmenter les revenus pour les agriculteurs. Qu'ils puissent vivre de l'agriculture. Que ce soit son moyen de vivre. On éviterait comme ça la migration, des conflits régionaux.

Quand on lui demande sur la position des ONGs dans la COP8, voici les mots d'Aldrin:

- C'est temps d'agir. Il faut absolument établir des nouvelles bases- dit-

il-... Faire un fond commun entre tous, agir ensemble pour éviter la dégradation de la terre. Impliquer les Etats puisque c'est un phénomène qui implique à tous les Etats. Il faut s'impliquer.

Pour finir notre interview, nous voulons qu'il nous donne son point de vue sur la sécurité alimentaire, un des point de cette COP8.

- La dégradation de la terre, la perte de fertilité du sol, diminue la surface cultivable- dit- il. A mesure que la dégradation, la désertification augmente, la production agricole diminue.

Si on veut résoudre ce grave problème, la seule solution est de le faire avec un programme global. Il faut se souvenir que lutter contre la désertification est: lutter contre la pauvreté. □



ECO is produced daily by
Ecologistas en Acción

The editorial team welcomes concise articles for publication in ECO.

Please give your articles to
eco@ecologistasenaccion.org

Funding for the production of ECO has been provided by the UNCCD Secretariat.

The editorial team reserves the right to edit articles for clarity and length.

We would like to thank all the journalists, the translators and the association De Amicitia for their collaboration in this bulletin.

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