

Our understanding of the UNCCD strategy evolution

/ by the GTD - ReSaD

The 2008-2018 strategy

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) 2008-2018 strategy has been adopted during the COP 8 in 2007 in Madrid and aimed to provide the Convention with a more centred orientation and to strengthen its implementation by the creation of a truly global partnership to combat desertification, land degradation and the effects of drought (DLDD). To that purposes, 4 strategic objectives and 5 operational objectives have been selected. The strategic objectives going back over the Convention objectives are the following:

1. **Improvement of the living conditions of affected populations** thanks to the improvement and diversification of livelihoods, to the adoption of income generating methods of sustainable land management (SLM) and to the reduction of their vulnerability to climate change and drought;
2. **Improvement of the conditions of affected ecosystems** thanks to the improvement of land productivity and ecosystem services related and to the reduction of their vulnerability to climate change and drought;
3. **To generate global benefits** such as biodiversity preservation, sustainable use of natural resources and climate change mitigation;
4. **Establishment of effective partnerships between national and international actors** in order to mobilize resources in favour of the UNCCD implementation thanks to the provision of financial and non-financial resources for affected Parties.

The 5 operational objectives allowed to define the strategy's mode of actions:

1. **Advocacy, awareness raising and education** in order to strengthen information and media coverage of DLDD;
2. **Policy framework definition** by assessing barriers, by revising National Actions Programs (NAPs) and by strengthening synergies between the different Rio's conventions action plans and development and cooperation programs;
3. **To become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge** by supporting national monitoring, by developing a baseline of reference, by improving knowledge on biophysical and socioeconomic factors as well as on interactions between climate change adaptation, drought mitigation and degraded land restoration and by increasing knowledge sharing between various actors;
4. **To strengthen capacities** of affected countries by evaluating their capacities and NAPs implementation;
5. **To increase funding and technology transfer** for affected countries from developed Parties and international and innovative institutions and financial mechanisms.



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Mixed results

If the implementation of such a strategy has allowed to fill some vagueness concerning UNCCD orientations and priorities, the 2008-2018 strategy results are mixed despite the implementation of numerous initiatives.

DLDD challenges persist for anthropic and natural causes. The challenge is enormous but have trouble to be completed.

First of all, we notice that drought mitigation and vulnerability reduction of affected populations turn out to be insufficient. Indeed, numerous Sub-Saharan countries suffered from severe food crisis following droughts situations in 2016 such as Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia. In April 2017, after a hard drought in the horn of Africa and in Sahel, millions of people are again threatened of hunger in Nigeria, Somalia, South Soudan and Yemen. The crisis could spread to Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad and in the north of Mali.

This is questioning the efficacy of the totality of international mechanisms faced to crisis situations which, even though better predicted by alert systems, do not reach to be anticipated and managed in a satisfactory manner. Concerning UNCCD share in this assessment, it can be explained by the late implementation of the 2008-2018 strategy: in 2013, only eleven states had revised their NAPs according to the strategy¹. In 2015, only 48% NAPs have been revised whereas the target of revised PAN for 2014 was of 80%². The pertinence and efficacy of these NAPs in affected countries is also questioned because their integration and implementation within national strategies are often too weak in intensity faced to the challenges.

However, some objectives of the strategy have been realized successfully thanks to the diffusion of the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) concept adopted in Rio in 2012 (Rio+20) in the declaration “the future we want”. This allowed to give more precision and visibility to the UNCCD and to constitute a strong synergy argument with other international conventions such as the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) and the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity). UNCCD is de facto less marginalized than in the past.

The 2018-2030 strategy

Consequently, the 2018-2030 strategy should aim to avoid, reduce and reverse desertification and land degradation, to mitigate drought effects and to participate to a land degradation neutral world of the 2030 agenda. To these ends, strategic objectives of the 2008-2018 strategy have been conserved with nevertheless some modifications going towards a bigger operational precision.

¹ UNCCD (2013), *Mid-term evaluation of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018)*, p.9.

² *Ibid.*



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1. **To improve the condition of affected ecosystems, combat desertification and land degradation, promote SLM and contribute to land degradation neutrality:** this should allow to improve land productivity and ecosystems services related, to reduce their vulnerability, to adopt LDN national targets and to implement SLM measures;
2. **To improve the life conditions of affected populations:** this should drive to a food security, access to water and lifestyles improvement thanks to their diversification as well as to an increased participation of local populations whose women and youth in DLDD decision-making and to a reduction of forced migrations caused by desertification and land degradation;
3. **To generate global environmental benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD:** SLM and combating desertification and land degradation should allow to preserve and use sustainably biodiversity, to cope with climate changes and to strengthen Rio's Conventions synergies;
4. **To mobilize additional financial and non-financial resources in favour of UNCCD implementation by building efficient partnerships at international and national levels:** this should allow the mobilisation of additional public and private financial resources, North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation and to extend efforts in order to promote technology transfers.

What is changing

Some important changes can be analysed.

LDN implementation

In the first place, given the success of LDN in UNCCD media coverage strategy, the new strategy is in a way more oriented towards its effective implementation. For this purpose, the new strategy must participate in the realisation of UNCCD objectives but also of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically to the goal 15 and its target 15.3 regarding LDN achievement. Indeed, UNCCD has received mandate for this target. In agreement with this new vision, the strategy is aligned with SDGs agenda taking place on the same period from 2018 to 2030. Moreover, if in the 2008-2018 strategy the goal was to “reverse and prevent” desertification and land degradation, alignment with LDN transformed this objective by “avoid, reduce, reverse” desertification and land degradation. Then, LDN objective has been included in the strategic objective concerning ecosystems conditions. The Science Policy Interface (SPI) creation and the allocation of one of its first objectives to the LDN precision is a signal that we should consider as very positive the possible inputs from science.

Strategic objectives' order change

Alignment with LDN strengthened the strategic objective on ecosystems conditions and placed it on the first position in the 2018-2030 strategy relegating in second position the strategic objective concerning improvement of the life conditions of affected populations. It is not sure at all that this switch is good news even if causal relationship is obvious. UNCCD mandate concerning arid areas and their populations is a challenge sufficiently relevant and justified both by solidarity and equity questions than for political stability ones. It is risky to link the future of populations only to the future of ecosystems. However, good news is the integration of food security and access to water





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improvement for affected populations; the increased participation of local population and more specifically of women and youth and the reduction of forced migrations caused by DLDD. Concerning ecosystems, it is not anymore about solely to improve their conditions and to reduce their vulnerabilities, but to implement more concrete actions and objectives such as productivity, national targets and measures which are required. Concerning general advantages, SLM is mentioned such as the way to reach the objective.

Development of new funding sources

LDN should also be mobilized in order to increase funding aiming to implement the new strategy. To this purpose, public-private partnerships should be strengthened and the global mechanism should develop new funding opportunities whose “LDN Fund to implement the strategy”. Indeed, the formulation evolves from “put at disposal” to “mobilize”, showing a viewpoint more active including non-conventional and additional financial sources. In a context of public funds rarefaction the use of private partnerships is mandatory. It is nevertheless risky because every private investment aims first of all financial returns which should be supervised by constraints linked to the general interest pursuit. Who will guarantee it? Beyond that, there is also the question of beneficiaries especially the most vulnerable.

Taking into consideration drought?

Finally, a strategic objective concerning drought mitigation, resilience improvement and reduction of population and ecosystems vulnerability to drought is written but not formally included in the 2018-2030 strategy. This question is debating and vague desires of a drought protocol are appearing, carried on especially by East of Africa.

Civil society point of view

Generally, there is a tendency of UNCCD managers to precise objectives and we should be glad about it, even if it happens late: UNCCD has too long suffered from a lack of clarification in diverse fields, which makes favourable a game of return of responsibility between States and within these last ones. Moreover, a science deficit did not help to make some clarifications.

However, changes made within this new strategy call out civil society on UNCCD evolution which tends to drive away from its original objectives, which are unfortunately still actual.

UNCCD objective

In a first place, LDN integration within the strategy raises questions on UNCCD’s geographical mandate. Indeed, LDN is included in SDGs, it is therefore a global goal whereas to date, UNCCD relates only to affected Parties which means to states belonging to “arid, semi-arid and/or dry sub-



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humid areas affected or threatened by desertification”³. UNCCD’s action frame could therefore be enlarged during 2018-2030 strategy adoption. GTD is not in favour of an enlargement of the geographical area concerned by UNCCD for numerous reasons:

- Geographical area enlargement would come down to allocate financial and non-financial means towards more countries contributing to a reduction of these means for actual affected Parties,
- It does not seem relevant to enlarge the geographical area given the fact that UNCCD is far from having had a significant incidence on actual affected areas;
- Africa has always been considered like a priority area and it is necessary that it remains like that in UNCCD.

GTD thinks that the scope of the UNCCD in arid areas could be specified by mentioning ecosystems especially relevant to preserve. For illustration, oases ecosystems are both a way to achieve LDN targets for concerned countries and a structuring element in arid areas.

UNCCD Mandate

In a second place, strategic objectives concerning ecosystems conditions and improvement of the life conditions of affected populations have been switched in favour of the first one. If officially there is no hierarchy between strategic objectives, this change is nevertheless not neutral given the fact that it involves to set up different implementation mechanisms. GTD is therefore not in favour of this objectives switch. Indeed, UNCCD placed populations as the priority of its action: “Affirming that human beings in affected or threatened areas are at the centre of concerns to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought”⁴. This modification involves consequently a modification of UNCCD mandate and of its fundamental orientations. Given the actual suffering situation of affected populations, this change could worsen actual challenges such as forced migrations which will go against the strategy initial objectives.

Funding issue

Related to LDN goal, the Global Mechanism received mandate to create an independent specific fund (LDNF) in order to allow the strategy implementation. However, after a first feasibility phase and during the setting up phase, it appeared that if this fund should invest around 80%⁵ in developing countries, investments in UNCCD affected countries will be marginal because of the high level of investment risk in these areas. GTD ventures a doubt concerning the Global mechanism mandate, a UNCCD mechanism, in this fund development. Indeed, the LDNF will contribute to LDN but not primarily in the UNCCD affected areas. It will therefore not allow to implement the strategy, or it will

³ UNCCD first article.

⁴ UNCCD prologue.

⁵ Mirova presentation by Gautier Queru during Desertif’Actions 2017 the 27th of June 2017.





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only allow its implementation in the case of a UNCCD related geographical area enlargement, a change that GTD contests.

Consideration of civil society

Civil society is present in the majority of UNCCD action fields, whether it be in advocacy, raising awareness, as support in SLM projects decision-making, implementation or monitoring. It is mentioned in the UNCCD original document and in previous strategies. However, no specific mention of civil society has been done in the 2018-2030 strategy draft. GTD rejects this situation which questions UNCCD founder spirit considered for its civil society consideration.

Civil society being closer to population in the field, it is essential that civil society role and involvement be mentioned and recognized in the new strategy.



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