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“Development on the margin”

How Can the UNCCD and other Conventions Support and Enable Sustainable Land Management in Fragile Ecosystems?

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Abstract

Land, climate and biodiversity are inseparably linked. In 1992 three Rio Conventions were adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) in Rio to establish an international legal framework to meet the global environmental challenges referring to land, climate and biodiversity.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) focuses on the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has the objective to stabilise the greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) aims at combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought in affected countries.

In each of the conventions terms and aims, the conservation and sustainable use of fragile ecosystems have a high priority. Fragile Ecosystems are important ecosystems with unique features and resources, which are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, desertification and loss of biodiversity and are therefore integrated in each of the conventions framework to be particularly worth protecting.

To fulfil the obligations and objectives of the three Rio conventions, Sustainable Land Management (SLM) is increasingly recognised as a common denominator of most environmental and development goals and is becoming a vital component of programmes to meet the global challenges, especially in highly vulnerable ecosystem, *e.g.* drylands.

However, based on experiences in the implementation process bottlenecks and challenges have become evident. As a multilateral agreement the conventions struggle to prove its effectiveness on the ground. In the case of the three Rio Conventions, National Action Plans (NAPs, NBSAPs, NAPAs), embedded in the conventions framework as binding instruments on a national level, have emerged as a popular tool to identify national options and strategies for implementation of global agreements. But still, global and national expectations from National Action Plans are often neither synergistic, nor realistic and need to be adapted on the basis of successful best practices and lessons learned.

Using the example of several existing successful initiatives and programmes implemented in drylands, the conventions prove its potential to establish and improve a national and international legal framework for implementation measures on the local level as well as to mobilise additional funds (*e.g.* GEF) for such measures. The Conventions also contribute to raise awareness amongst the national and international political and scientific community and thus put relevant environmental issues on the national and international political agenda.

Keywords: Conventions, Sustainable land management