

**SUBREGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BUILDING FORUM FOR CENTRAL ASIAN
REPUBLICS: CONFRONTING LAND DEGRADATION AND POVERTY
THROUGH ENHANCED UNCCD IMPLEMENTATION**

**Convened under the Aegis of the Strategic Partnership to Combat Desertification in
Central Asia (SPA)**

**Tashkent, Uzbekistan
30 June – 4 July 2003**

**TASHKENT JOINT PLATFORM OF ACTION FOR
UNCCD IMPLEMENTATION**

The *Sub-regional Partnership Building Forum for Central Asia: Confronting Land Degradation and Poverty through Enhanced UNCCD Implementation* was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from 30 June – 4 July with representatives from the Ministries and agencies dealing with Environment, Finance, Agriculture, Water, Forests, Land Management, Hydrometeorology, Economy, Planning, Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Central Asian Republics, members of research organizations, subregional bodies and civil society representatives as well as representatives of international development cooperation agencies.

The participants emphasised the linkages between poverty and desertification that emerged from the discussions, as well as the need for collaboration and partnership between national, subregional and international stakeholders in supporting the efforts of the Central Asian Republics in enhancing the implementation of the U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNCCD).

The participants also acknowledge the importance of the Strategic Partnership for Implementation of UNCCD in Central Asian Republics (SPA) as an effective framework for collaboration between its members¹ in facilitating support to the Central Asian Republics (CARs) with relation to UNCCD related activities. The participants welcomed the broadening of this partnership to include Switzerland and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) and look forward to the joining of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other interested partners.

In addition, the participants validated the draft *Issues and Approaches to Combat Desertification* papers prepared for each Central Asian Republic and the document titled *An Overview: A Regional Synthesis Report on Issues and Approaches to Combat Desertification*, as valuable inputs to this Forum, and recognized their importance in orienting discussions nationally as well as with international partners.

The participants recognized the extent of the problem of desertification/land degradation and the corresponding impact on living conditions of populations as well as the extreme vulnerability of the ecosystems of the region. The participants underlined the urgent need for coordinated responses and inter-sectoral harmonization and called for the fostering of an enabling policy, legislative and institutional environment, for the inclusion of local

¹ The Global Mechanism of the UNCCD, the Asian Development Bank through its RETA 5941, the CCD Project of GTZ, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA)

community and civil society needs and priorities, and for overall strengthening of participatory decision making. The participants agreed on the necessity for the efficient use of national resources and the mobilization of external support in the form of finances, technical expertise, transfer of clean technologies and private sector involvement.

Based on the above, the participants of the *Subregional Partnership Building Forum* emphasized their long-term commitment to pursuing the following:

- Initiate a high level policy dialogue on issues related to desertification/land degradation and facilitate the integration of socio-economic and ecological objectives of the UNCCD into the development policy agenda;
- Speed up the integration of UNCCD objectives into poverty reduction/improvement of living conditions strategies, as well as, into national development planning frameworks and any other strategies that may have implications on the management of natural resources, poverty eradication/living conditions strategies and development of rural communities. Likewise, development cooperation agencies commit to integrate the UNCCD into their respective cooperation frameworks and development strategies;
- Create an enabling programmatic, legislative and institutional environment that fosters local management over natural resources, mitigation and rehabilitation of degraded lands and for the promotion of an adequate allocation of national resources for these objectives;
- Facilitate inter-sectoral coordination for promoting joint solutions for addressing issues related to desertification/land degradation;
- Collaborate with civil society organisations in implementing UNCCD objectives, with the aim to expand opportunities for these groups, and to use and share their expertise for delivery and implementation of local-level initiatives;
- Empower the UNCCD Focal Point so that he/she may effectively engage in national planning processes, collaborate with other Agenda 21 Conventions and other sectoral agencies for building synergies and for participation in negotiations with external partners;
- Launch immediately a process for taking advantage of new opportunities presented by the Global Environment Facility's (GEF) new Operational Programme on Sustainable Land Management (OP 15), both with relation to capacity building and investment projects;
- Enhance sub-regional cooperation in the field of sustainable natural resource management, as well as, issues of transboundary significance related to desertification/land degradation and use the UNCCD as a potential framework as appropriate;
- Integrate the UNCCD objectives with ongoing subregional initiatives on sustainable development in Central Asia; and
- The Forum urges the establishment in each Central Asian Republic a *Working Group on Partnership Development for UNCCD Implementation* including both national and international partners, to assist with realising the above objectives, and commit to work in accordance with the Terms of Reference attached in the Report of the Forum,

outlining the roles and responsibilities of the respective members of this Working Group.

The participants validated the process of partnership building initiated at this Forum and welcomed the participation of a diverse group of country stakeholders. A rich and varied set of activities and opportunities was identified and agreed upon at the Forum, which will be described in the Report of the Forum. The participants also welcomed the acknowledgement by international partners of the challenges and opportunities of this subregion with relation to translating the objectives of the UNCCD into concrete actions. As a first step to strengthening activities at the country level and for designing country specific resource mobilisation strategies, the participants agreed to establish *Working Groups on Partnership Development for UNCCD Implementation* in each Central Asian Republic.

The participants call upon the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD to further support resource mobilization efforts in each country, and follow-up on the activities and opportunities which will be described in the Report of the Forum, prior to organizing country level partnership building forums for resource mobilization.