

Synthesis Latin America and the Caribbean

Literature Review

1. Formal compliance with selected obligations of the convention:

The NAP documents comply to a high degree with the CCD's requirements, and in most cases have considered COP decisions. Although all of the NAPs were written with guidance and financial support from donor agencies, the following practical implementation processes have however in most cases soon after their launch started to abandon the CCD's key principles, and continued implementing mostly isolated large-scale sectoral (so called NAP-related) projects and programmes.

In very few cases the NAP's original momentum to improve participation and inter-institutional coordination lead to a continuous harmonisation effort independent of political developments and supported by appropriate legislation. Initial successes in establishing coordination bodies and NGO networks soon subsided, and in many cases left the NAPs politically invisible. Middle-income countries such as e.g. Argentina however seem to enjoy a more stable environment to promote the CCD, and show significant progress in institutionalising the NAP's objectives, and in encouraging civil society participation.

In a number of cases the underlying analysis of causes and effects of desertification as a complex interaction of human and natural factors is still insufficient, and does not provide an adequate data basis for the NAP's monitoring and evaluation. Most NAPs do emphasise the link between poverty and natural resource use, but have rarely established operational links to PRSPs or other relevant social development strategies.

Some of the NAPs have started prior to the CCD, and have actively contributed to develop the Convention and its application on the political level. In the majority of cases however the NAPs have subsequently focused mainly on technical aspects, and neglected the establishment of appropriate inter-institutional mechanisms. Visibility of concrete actions on the ground which translate SLM objectives into tangible experiences remains low.

Most NAPs in the LAC region have clearly articulated the demand for change and describe future scenarios in case of in-action, but do not provide adequate data on economic and social consequences of degradation processes. Early warning systems have been established in selected pilot regions, but none of the analysed countries has so far put a nationwide and fully operational drought early warning system in place.

Although the NAPs have identified participatory consultations as a key element in their implementation process, and have significantly increased the South-South dialogue (esp. within TPNs, SRAPs and research networks), the majority of NAP documents remain static products without engaging in appropriate regular updates, and therefore losing ground in comparison to other national strategies.

2. Type of strategy:

All of the eight NAPs are designed as either transsectoral processes or strategic frameworks to mainstream SLM aspects into national policies. Some countries more than others are used to large-scale planning exercises, but in most cases the NAP elaboration, data collection and processing did not pose a major problem. The programme's follow fairly similar structures, and focus mainly on: 1) presenting a baseline on desertification (cause and effect), 2) setting up an institutional framework to implement the NAP, and 3) suggesting a number of strategic lines of action to implement the NAP.

In addition, every NAP includes lists with concrete activities to reach its goals, although some programmes highlight their facilitating role rather than seeking to actually implement projects. Even though including guidance for its stakeholders, the NAP process has in most cases not yet clearly defined the relevant roles and responsibilities. Partnership agreements which aim at securing basic commitment have not yet been sufficiently established.

Nevertheless, the NAPs have in some cases contributed to applying innovative approaches for a more integrated land use planning, thus bringing together a variety of stakeholders which previously shared little communication. Especially community-based organisations on the local level have taken up principles of SLM and stakeholder coordination, and work across sectoral boundaries. These efforts however remain mostly regional and isolated.

More recent NAPs appear to be increasingly open towards integration with other strategies, and place the emphasis on facilitation rather than implementation. Nevertheless, continuous political changes and substitution of staff throughout all levels have in many cases limited progress, and tend to sustain preference for larger sectoral programmes which attract funding more easily and result in more immediate political recognition amongst voters.

3. Legitimacy and participation:

All of the NAPs were elaborated in a participatory manner, and included a series of regional consultations, supported by national validation events. Every process underlines the importance of participation, although articulated in different forms. Mostly, participation still occurs in a voluntary manner and under informal conditions. Rarely NAPs have been fully converted into national law, and are backed by high-level politics. In some cases however, the NAPs have been formalised and are being supported by parliamentary committees.

Participation is usually high from those supporting the process, but very low to virtually non-existent from those (partly) contributing to the problem by unsustainable practices (like large monocultures, industrial agriculture, logging companies, mining industry, etc.). This is reflected in the lack of integration of the private sector in NCBs, and the articulated need to better address opposing interests and sensitive topics within the NAP processes.

Compared to other national strategies (such as biodiversity, rural development, health, etc.) the NAPs and their Focal Point institutions are usually in a weak position, and do not have access to the required funding which makes initiatives more attractive to stakeholders. In some cases, the NAP's added-value to a country's political landscape has been successfully communicated and (both national and international) institutions have shown increased interest in the process. In their majority however the NAPs remain invisible and are seen as duplication of efforts rather than adding value to existing development initiatives.

Civil society plays an important role in securing the continuity of NAPs, and wherever an appropriate NGO network (RIOD) is operational it offers support to the process and at the same time provides the necessary counterbalance to government actions. NGOs mainly engage in information exchange and awareness raising, but do also support the implementation of pilot activities. Most governments support a greater participation of NGOs in the NAPs, but indicate the need for more funding to create an enabling environment.

4. Operational details of the NAP implementation processes:

Most advances have been made in raising awareness and creating interest in the problem. Joint programmes are mostly undertaken in conjunction with educational institutions, attempting to sensitise the population, and integrate SLM aspects into school curricula. These efforts have produced a wide range of materials (flyers, maps, books, videos, etc.).

Some operational advances have also been achieved establishing first initiatives in benchmarks, M&E, and strengthening the stakeholders' capacities to conduct monitoring. Most approaches however remain theoretical, and have not yet put pilot activities into place. Nevertheless, efforts in assessing the degree of desertification contributed to the identification of hot spots, and prioritised the geographical regions to receive initial attention.

Selected pilot activities have taken place in nearly all countries, and mostly addressed issues of soil conservation and water management. The link between desertification and water resources remains strong, and led to implementing initiatives such as improved irrigation techniques and water harvesting (cisterns, etc.). To some extent the NAPs have also helped to facilitate new legislation aimed at balancing resource use and conservation.

Some of the biggest challenges within the NAPs remain the lack of political continuity and the absence of appropriate handover processes. In many cases the NAPs have too little political backing and influence to achieve sustainability, and progress in implementation is often wiped out by electoral events and associated political conflict as well as staff changes.

Reality check

5. Is the NAP or SLM a line item in the national budget?

In most cases the action programmes do not give specific information about its implementation costs, and have not been integrated into national budget frameworks. If the NAP already forms a budget line item (in three of the eight analysed countries), the attributed funds are usually very limited or fail to be disbursed. Appropriate spending mechanisms are mostly not in place. Almost all investments related to natural resource management and conservation are still channeled through separate large-scale sectoral projects.

In many cases larger amounts of national co-financing are dedicated to support the formulation of full-size GEF projects. Few data is however available on how much funding and what resources are finally at hand to carry out implementation. Although proposed in a number of NAPs, *National Funds for Desertification and Drought* have not yet been established, and other environmental funds (protected areas, forestry, etc.) are only accessible to a limited degree for financing NAP activities.

6. Integration of NAPs with other relevant national strategies:

In the majority of cases the NAPs have not yet developed the desired effect of being a reference for other sectoral or multi-sectoral strategies. Although some NAPs are mentioned in other policies, and most NAPs do make reference to other strategies (such as PRSPs), there are still little practical and operational links. The need for integration does not yet translate into the necessary alignment of objectives and criteria.

Operating principles such as funding, monitoring & evaluation, or knowledge management show little coordination, and regular consultation meetings are rare. NAPs themselves hardly ever appear in related sectoral strategies (such as agriculture, forestry, water, social development, etc.). Regarding the other Rio Conventions, most communication has taken place between CCD initiatives and efforts to preserve biodiversity. First experiences in coordinating actions and closer cooperation between focal points have shown promising results, which however mostly remain on the level of simple information exchange.

In relation to climate change, selected action programmes and regional initiatives have identified the clean development mechanism as a potential source for NAP funding (e.g. through carbon sequestration and payments for environmental services), and have started to

elaborate appropriate project profiles. In most cases however the intrinsic link between land degradation and climate change is not yet visible in potentially complementary planning mechanisms or actions (e.g. capacity building, negotiation processes, etc.).

7. Functioning of NCB & political ownership:

The majority of countries have a national coordination body in place, which however show very different levels of operation. Most NCBs work without proper budget, and are not supported by validated guidelines or statutes. In selected cases this lack of formalisation has however also been described as advantage, and resulted in a more dynamic and successful stakeholder coordination (compared to previous more formalised approaches). These efforts however linger mostly on the technical level, and generally lack high-level political backing.

Although most coordination bodies have achieved more civil society participation (integrating also previously marginalised population groups, such as indigenous people), the coordination structures on the national and decentralised level have not yet reached the desired incorporation of the private sector. Generally, the NCBs still act merely as platforms for information exchange, and have little influence on decision-making. Most sectoral ministries still operate independently, and show little interest in extending the NCB's authority.

8. Impacts:

Most progress has been achieved in relation to awareness raising, and in improving the understanding of the problem amongst politicians and the general public. The elaboration process has improved the interest in desertification as a major development challenge, and provided the countries with an experimental forum to test participation techniques, apply concerted planning mechanisms, and to improve stakeholder coordination. In many cases a first data baseline was established to serve as bottom line for future monitoring initiatives.

In most countries desertification and its related economic, social, and environmental challenges are now higher on the political agenda than ten years ago, and the NAPs have fostered an increased flow of information relating to resource management and conservation. In selected cases the NAPs have also contributed to more political responsibility, and led to mechanisms demanding more accountability within governmental structures. This was mainly achieved through a higher degree of civil society participation, which in some cases also helped to specifically shape the NAP's direction.

Capacity building through seminars and courses as well as stepped up efforts to integrate SLM and desertification issues into national education agendas will expectantly show long-term results and help change behavioural patterns of affected societies. First pilot activities have been implemented in most countries, and gathered lessons learned valuable for the implementation of future large-scale operations. Nonetheless, most activities still concentrate on sectoral projects, which are limited in time and space, and mostly do not consider the integrated approach to resource management promoted by the CCD.

9. Interest of the donor community:

Donors have shown little interest in supporting the NAPs beyond their elaboration and beyond providing selected support for initial pilot activities. Again, single and sectoral NAP-related programmes receive far greater donor attention, and keep capturing most available funding. Although nearly all NAPs promote regular donor forums, they are either not implemented or achieve little results. Most international funding for the CCD is still channeled through GEF projects, which also receives most attention as potential financing source.