

The CCD, poverty reduction & sustainable NR use

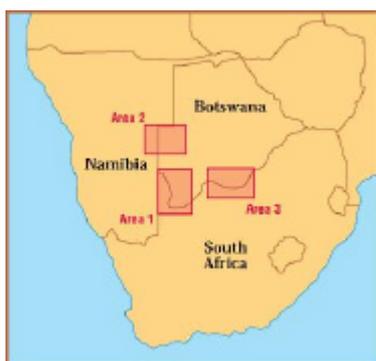
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PANRUSA Briefing Notes

PANRUSA, Poverty Policy and Natural Resource Use in Southern Africa. A DFID funded research project at the University of Sheffield UK.

Key points

- Land degradation is entwined with poverty and unsustainable NR use
- The CCD encourages integrated solutions to desertification
- Desertification occurs in the study areas, where unsustainable practices are occurring
- Action Plans to tackle the problem need to be agreed from government to community levels



Research areas:

1 Arid southwest:

- a) Mier, South Africa
- b) SW Kgalagadi, Botswana

2. Semiarid northwest:

- a) Ghanzi Dist, Botswana
- b) Omaheke, Namibia

3. Dry sub-humid southeast:

- a) NW Province South Africa
- b) Barolong, Botswana

This briefing provides an overview of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (the CCD) and its linkages to natural resource use and poverty reduction in rural Africa. The three countries embraced by the PANRUSA project, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, are amongst the 174 that have to date ratified the CCD and are therefore in agreement with its purpose, goals and strategies.

What is desertification?

Desertification is 'land degradation in arid, semi arid and dry subhumid areas resulting from various factors including climatic variability and human actions'. The processes of desertification include soil erosion at above-natural rates, salinization, the depletion of natural vegetation including its replacement with inferior plant communities, and the depletion of groundwater. Overall, it represents the degradation (not simply change) of natural resources in a manner that compromises land use practices and the availability of resources for future generations.

Desertification is caused by the actions of people, not necessarily deliberately, who may act for short term gain or survival because alternatives are not available to them. Desertification can be triggered by factors including droughts, changes in government policies, changes in access to land and changes in the market economy.

The CCD

The CCD encourages integrated actions by groups at all levels that are affected by desertification. Many previous international and national attempts to tackle the problem were deemed too 'top down'. The CCD also recognises that land degradation is not just an environmental problem: it involves people and can only be resolved by people who use the land or who make decisions about how land is used. The CCD also incorporates up-to-date scientific understanding of how dryland environments work. The Convention recognises the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of desertification.

Links with natural variability

Drought and other forms of natural environmental variability are not the same as desertification, but these events can contribute to people conducting unsustainable activities to meet their short term needs.

Links with poverty

Desertification-poverty links are complex. Poverty may force people to undertake activities that are unsustainable, because it is their only means of short term survival. On the other hand, land degradation may lead to poverty as people are unable to support themselves from the land.

Links with livelihoods

For many years rural African livelihoods were regarded by outsiders as environmentally damaging and unproductive. These were naïve and wrong assumptions, since traditional knowledge of the environment was often based on generations of direct experience. The commercialisation of agriculture, expansion of borehole based land uses, and the fencing of drylands all introduced in colonial times, have in many cases also been the backbone of development practices in post-independence times. Without consideration of how these activities affect traditional land uses, and without adaptations to incorporate drought times, they can rapidly lead to unsustainable natural resource use and compromised agricultural livelihoods.

People are the solution

The CCD recognises the strong links between poverty reduction, developing sustainable land uses and livelihoods, and the reduction of desertification. It also recognises that to do this it is necessary for decisions to engage the people directly affected by desertification: anti-desertification activities have to cease to be top-down decisions. Policies affecting drylands need to facilitate sustainable livelihoods for



De-vegetated sand dunes have resulted from high grazing pressures around this borehole in the SW Kalahari.

all people including non-agricultural activities at times of environmental stress. Partnerships between governments and their people, and donor nations and recipients, are central to CCD activities.

Southern Africa

Land degradation in the study areas

In PANRUSA study areas 1 and 2 desertification is mainly in the form of negative vegetation changes, (bush encroachment, annual grasses replacing nutritious perennials), wind erosion and borehole water depletion (see BN5, 5A & 5B). In area 3 nutrient depletion and wind and water erosion on arable lands are the main processes (see BN6). Negative changes are likely to increase under current policies and practices, but local people are aware of problems and have the knowledge, but not always the means, to alleviate them.

The CCD in southern Africa

The CCD operates through **national action plans**, jointly prepared by policy makers, NGOs and affected parties, to identify the agreed causes and solutions to desertification in specific contexts. Fourteen countries in Africa, including three in southern Africa but not Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, have to date published their NAPS. But SADC has produced a Sub Regional Action Plan, in 1997. This embraces fully the intent of the CCD, including recognition of the need for trans-boundary co-operation in sustainable resource management, the need to transfer appropriate knowledge and technology to the community level, and the need to reduce poverty, improve rural people's welfare, education and generate alternative livelihood systems.

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The PANRUSA website is
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/panrusa>
Staff can be contacted by email at
d.s.thomas@sheffield.ac.uk
d.sporton@sheffield.ac.uk
c.twyman@sheffield.ac.uk
Fax: +44 114 279 7912



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