



## Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification

Organized by the Governments of Algeria, China and Italy, and the UNCCD secretariat

Beijing, China, 29 May – 1 June 2006

### Provisional agenda and programme of work

#### 1. Background

“...women living in dry lands tend to rank among the poorest of the poor, with little power to bring about real change. The United Nations Convention on Desertification and Drought underlines the important role played by women in ensuring implementation of the Convention. Yet, with ownership and decision-making over land and livestock remaining predominantly in the male domain, women are often excluded from participation in land conservation and development projects, from agricultural extension work, and from the overall policy-making process”

*Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General  
on the occasion of 17 June, the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought*

1. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) breaks new ground by enshrining a bottom-up approach in international law. It repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the full participation of all stakeholders, including civil society, and underlines the important role played by women, referring to their capital role in sustainable land management in dryland regions. It calls upon Parties to increase awareness of the importance of this role, and to facilitate the active participation of women in policy processes and initiatives relating to desertification. The issue is no longer a matter only of incorporating women into agricultural management; their empowerment is paramount in the design of poverty reduction strategies in areas suffering from desertification and drought.

2. The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995) recognized that the continuing environmental degradation often has a more direct impact on women. Women's health and their livelihoods are threatened by large-scale deforestation, desertification, drought, and depletion of the soil and of coastal and marine resources. Those most affected are rural and indigenous women, whose daily subsistence depends directly on sustainable ecosystems. In its Platform for Action, the Conference called upon the international community, including civil society and the private sector, to take strategic action in overcoming gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment.

*What has changed in rural women's conditions, ten years after the Beijing Conference?  
Do women still have a special role in combating desertification?  
Does it matter for land management whether the decision maker is a man or a woman?*

3. Time and again, it has been recognized that women have a special potential for fostering rural development because they work with natural resources on a daily basis. Yet rural development projects and food-for-work schemes that targeted women exclusively had only limited success. It became clear that when

countering soil degradation and rural poverty, focusing on women alone would help little if the basic structure of inequality between men and women remained unaddressed.

4. Against this background, the UNCCD secretariat, in collaboration with country Parties and with other international organizations, decided to organize an international conference on the role of women in combating desertification, in the same country that hosted the 1995 Conference.

5. The Conference has been conceived in the framework of the 2006 International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD), which was declared by the General Assembly, taking into consideration the exacerbation of desertification, particularly in Africa, and its far-reaching implications for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. This Conference is one among several major conferences which will mark the celebration of the Year.

6. Women and desertification was also the theme in celebrating the 2005 World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (GA resolution A/RES/49/115, 19 December 1994). The results of a number of initiatives undertaken by countries and local communities worldwide during 2005 will also be reported during the Conference.

## **2. Objectives**

7. This Conference will enable participants to explore ways and means of strengthening the linkages between the key players of various affected Parties, especially at the grassroots level. In particular, it will enable:

- The creation of reviewing and assessing mechanisms aimed at empowering local communities, particularly women, in order to allow end-users to participate fully in land-use choice and the adoption of sustainable land management techniques;
- The sharing of experience among local communities and women's associations worldwide through success stories and presentations on current bottlenecks, thereby facilitating a learning exercise geared towards the drafting of recommendations for future UNCCD actions in line with the broader Beijing 1995 strategic orientations for adequate empowerment of women in dryland ecosystems;
- The identification and putting into place of adequate means of disseminating appropriate technologies, of improving women's ability to access information in desertification-prone regions, and of deciding upon pilot activities at national, subregional and regional levels which will ensure that women's issues are fully embedded into action programmes promoted by the UNCCD;
- The devising of a mechanism by which recommendations for priority actions are channelled towards decision makers including the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP) and the donor communities, and by which continuous updates on progress are made through channels to be identified.

## **3. Working languages**

8. The working languages of the Conference in plenary will be Chinese, English, French and Spanish.

## **4. Participants**

9. The Conference will convene participants from five Regional Implementation Annexes of the UNCCD, including representatives of civil society and resource persons, who are experts in the fields of gender issues and sustainable development, particularly in agriculture, soil conservation and community-based organizations. It is also expected that a number of high-level country representatives and other eminent personalities will take part in the Conference.

10. Representatives from United Nations specialized agencies, financial institutions, bilateral cooperation agencies and the scientific communities will also be invited to participate.

## 5. Documentation

11. In addition to this provisional agenda and programme of work, an information note for registered participants will also be issued, providing detailed information on the Conference venue, travel arrangements, and so on. Three background documents (“Challenges and opportunities for women in the drylands - A global perspective”, “Beijing Platform for Action - Review of the three main pillars within the framework of the UNCCD process”, “Women in drylands”) will be released before the beginning of the Conference, as well as abstracts of all presentations to the Conference. They will all be made available on the IYDD web site at <http://www.iydd.org/pages/beijing.htm>.

## 6. Expected outputs

12. It is anticipated that the proceedings of the Conference will be compiled, and will be published both electronically and in printed form. In addition to the full text of thematic and interactive panel presentations, proceedings will also include reports from working groups as well as final conclusions and recommendations constituting the Beijing Declaration.

## 7. Organization of work

**Monday, 29 May 2006**

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<b>08:30 - 09:30</b>	Arrival and registration of participants  <b>Opening meeting</b>
<b>09:30 - 10:30</b>	Welcoming address: High-level representatives of Algeria, China and Italy Executive Secretary of the UNCCD Representatives of local authorities, the academic community and civil society
<b>10:30 - 11:30</b>	Statements by ministers of country Parties of five UNCCD Regional Implementation Annexes
<b>11:30 - 11:45</b>	Coffee break
<b>11:45 - 13:00</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> plenary meeting</b>  Adoption of the agenda  Election of officers, including a rapporteur  Keynote presentation: “Challenges and opportunities for women in the drylands - A global perspective”  Keynote presentation: “Women and Combating Desertification in China”  Screening of a film on deserts (produced by the Algerian and Italian ministries of the environment)
<b>13:00 - 15:30</b>	Lunch break

15:30 - 18:30

**2<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting**

Round table: "Women in action for land conservation and sustainable development"

*Discussion*

18:30

Reception

***Tuesday, 30 May 2006***

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09:00 - 09:30

Introduction to the organization of work of the Conference  
Introduction by Conference rapporteur and resource persons

09:30 - 13:00

**3<sup>rd</sup> plenary meeting**

Thematic presentations:

"Beijing Platform for Action - Review of the three main pillars within the framework of the UNCCD process"

Topics:

- Active involvement of women in environmental decision-making at all levels
- Integration of gender concerns and perspectives into policies and programmes for sustainable development
- Strengthening or establishment of mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact on women of development and environmental policies

*Discussion*

"Women in drylands"

Topics:

- Agriculture and land issues, access to land, natural resources and credit
- Women and sustainable dryland development - the wider socio-economic context: health, education, capacity building

*Discussion*

"New opportunities for women and sustainable development"

Case studies:

- The case of reforestation and the Clean Development Mechanism
- Solar energy for schools in the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Economic opportunities for women in the drylands – Joint initiatives among private sector and local farmers
- Improving the daily life and health of women and children in the drylands
- Women in watershed development and the Millennium Development Goals
- Empowering women: A pivotal protagonist in the fight against desertification in the Sahel
- Comprehensive approach on rural development, poverty reduction and prevention of desertification
- The Missira bio-market: Reshaping citizen's/consumers' perception and taste as a sustainable development factor

*Discussion*

**13:00 - 15:00**

Lunch break

**15:00 - 17:30**

**Thematic working groups**

***Wednesday, 31 May 2006***

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**09:30 - 13:00**

**Thematic working groups**

**13:00 - 15:00**

Lunch break

**15:00 - 17:30**

**Thematic working groups**

Working groups are expected to prepare their reports and submit them to the drafting group, which will prepare the draft conclusions and recommendations

***Thursday, 1 June 2006***

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**09:30 - 13:00**

**Closing meeting**

Presentation of draft conclusions and recommendations by the Conference rapporteur

Discussion of draft conclusions and recommendations

Adoption of Beijing Declaration

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