



Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification

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

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

1. Introduction

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.”

Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General

1. Women’s equal participation in the economic and political development of communities and countries has been recognized as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving international sustainable development commitments. The Beijing Conference resulted in the most comprehensive platform for action to achieve gender equality. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) aims “to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification... in the framework of an integrated approach which is consistent with Agenda 21, with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in affected areas.”¹

2. This document provides a brief historical overview of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) and the UNCCD. It focuses on “women and environment” within a sustainable development and rights framework. The major United Nations conferences and summits are summarized, starting with the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women. Parallels are drawn between the provisions for women’s participation as reflected in the UNCCD and those in the BPA and Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The implementation of gender-related principles by Parties to the UNCCD is also reviewed. Finally, the current situation regarding challenges and opportunities is presented, and areas are identified where lessons learned can lead to strategies and new implementation models.

2. Background and context

The road to Beijing

3. Since the 1970s women’s rights and their political and economic empowerment have moved gradually to the central agenda of the international community. The World Conferences on Women drove the agenda for women’s equal rights and empowerment, starting in 1975 and leading up to the Beijing Conference in 1995. During these two decades, progress towards gender equality was achieved in some areas; results were uneven, however. A major factor contributing to the slow advance was the spreading

¹ UNCCD Art. 2.1; UNCCD references to the participation of women are in the Prologue, Art. 5, Art. 10.2, Art. 19.1 & 3.

economic crises and growing poverty in many developing countries. As a result, women's rights were low on national and international agendas. The Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, followed by the 1990s series of United Nations conferences, took stock of progress made and challenges remaining. They also reflected the political will to introduce the changes necessary towards achieving gender equality.

Conference title / Date	Major commitments / Results
First World Conference on Women, Mexico 1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Launch of the United Nations Decade for Women
Third World Conference on Women, Nairobi 1985	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adoption of “Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women”, addressing issues such as literacy, equal access to health care, training programmes, access to land and other productive resources, agricultural development, and credit and investment opportunities; ● Women’s full participation in environmental management and in political life; women defined as “intermediaries between the natural environment and society”; ● Proactive, multi-faceted and flexible approach to implementation.
Five-year Review of Forward-Looking Strategies (United Nations ECOSOC 1990)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Conference emphasized that implementation had slowed and urgent action was needed; ● Progress was noted in <i>de jure</i> equality; slow progress in <i>de facto</i> equality evident to the advancement of women, low priority being given in many countries; ● A Fourth World Conference 1995 was recommended.²
Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992 (UNCED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adoption of Agenda 21 – The global Plan of Action for Women towards sustainable development and environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increased participation in decision-making; ➤ Building capacity of women’s organizations; ➤ Measures to eliminate illiteracy; ➤ Programmes to alleviate women’s heavy workload; ➤ Women-centred health facilities, equal employment opportunities; ➤ Better information on the impact of environmental degradation on women. ● Chapter 12 - “Managing fragile ecosystems: Combating desertification and drought”. Governments should cooperate in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Systems for monitoring environmental, economic and social data; ➤ Soil conservation and re-/afforestation; ➤ Integration of ecosystem management with poverty eradication strategies; ➤ Integration of anti-desertification programmes into national development and environmental planning; ➤ Drought preparedness and drought relief schemes; ➤ Popular participation and environmental education. ● The Conference also called for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Women’s equal access to land, water and forest resources and to technologies, financing, marketing, processing and distribution; ➤ Special attention to women’s traditional knowledge; ➤ Gender-specific data as the basis for assessing needs and promoting local skills and know-how.

² United Nations ECOSOC Resolution E/Res/1990/15.

3. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

4. The Beijing Declaration and PFA, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, built on the commitments made at the previous World Conferences and the Forward-Looking Strategies. The PFA provides the most important comprehensive mandate for Governments to ensure that women's rights and gender equality are vigorously addressed as core development concerns.³ The Conference conceded that most of the goals in the Forward-Looking Strategies had not been achieved. "Barriers to women's empowerment remain, despite the efforts of Governments, as well as non-governmental organizations and women and men everywhere."⁴ Such barriers include: continuing systemic and ingrained discrimination against women, ongoing and even increasing levels of female poverty, inequality in access to education and in managing natural resources, etc. The Conference agreed on twelve critical areas of concern. The strategic objectives established for each of the critical areas were understood to be interlinked and mutually supportive. Critical Area A, "Women and Poverty", dealt with the complexity and multidimensionality of poverty. It addressed the need for change in economic structures and democratic processes, and recognized the acute challenges for women in rural areas. It called for an enabling and supportive context to allow the poor, particularly women, to utilize environmental resources sustainably.

5. Of particular relevance to the UNCCD is Critical Area K, "Women and the Environment". The strategic actions needed for sound environmental management require a holistic, multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach, and women's participation and leadership are essential to every aspect of that approach. The chapter on Critical Area K spells out three strategic objectives:

- (a) To involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels;
- (b) To integrate gender concerns and perspectives into policies and programmes for sustainable development;
- (c) To strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

6. A catalogue of concrete measures for each strategic objective calls on Governments at all levels, international organizations, the private sector and civil society to act.

- Actions require substantive changes in institutional structures to increase the proportion of women involved in environmental management and research;
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes should ensure that women's contributions are given the necessary prominence;
- Women's local and traditional knowledge is to be fully integrated into environmental strategies;
- Women's access to information, technology and education is essential so that women are fully involved in the generation of knowledge regarding environmental and related issues;
- Research gaps are to be addressed and new research should integrate gender equality with environmental sustainability.

Beijing Platform for Action review process

7. The five-year review of the Beijing PFA reaffirmed the strategic objectives and the need for coordinated action at all levels. Government and civil society reports recognized that "even though significant positive developments can be identified, barriers remain and there is still the need to further implement the goals and commitments made in Beijing."⁵ The reports' references to "women and the environment" remained in generalities. "Environmental policies and programmes lack a gender perspective and fail to take

³ The PFA aims to accelerate the implementation of the Forward-Looking Strategies and to achieve equality rights for women and men by ensuring "women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making". Beijing Conference Report, Chapter 1. Annex II. I. Mission Statement.

⁴ Beijing Conference Report, Chapter 1: Resolutions Adopted by the Conference, Resolution 1. Annex II - The Beijing Platform for Action III. Critical Areas of Concern.

⁵ United Nations 2000, para. 6.

into account women's roles and their contributions to environmental sustainability."⁶ While the PFA had not included concrete time-bound targets and indicators, governments were now encouraged to establish explicit targets or measurable goals, and, where appropriate, quotas to promote progress towards gender equality. They were also urged to adopt legislation to protect women's knowledge and practices and to adapt environmental and agricultural policies to incorporate a gender perspective, e.g. "in cooperation with civil society, to support farmers, particularly women farmers and those living in rural areas, with education and training programmes".⁷

8. By the time of the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform, the "women and the environment" component had received progressively less attention. The United Nations Secretary-General noted that "relatively few countries [were] identifying this area as a priority for action"⁸ and the topic was mentioned in less than half (77) of the country reports.⁹ He concluded that an important lesson learned was "the need to consider gender perspectives in all aspects of the project cycle; to include both women and men in all activities in management; and to incorporate gender analysis in monitoring and evaluation"¹⁰. Finally, there should be closer cooperation between Governments and civil society, women's organizations and the private sector.

9. Observers from civil society concurred with that assessment. It suggested that other concerns had taken priority, such as globalization, the increased levels of poverty in many developing countries and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The multisectoral approach that would bring together all areas of development and environment had been abandoned for a sectoral approach where progress was made in some areas but not in others. The situation of rural women in particular, and environmental concerns, had seen the least improvement.

10. In "Beijing Betrayed",¹¹ summarizing women's organizations' assessments from 150 countries, achievements in women's empowerment are recognized in some areas. Governments are criticized, however, for their "piecemeal and incremental approach" to implementing the PFA, thereby undermining the realization of the Beijing promises. Regarding "women and the environment", the reports find that while some countries have adopted land ownership laws incorporating women's rights, and political representation in environment ministries has increased, in many countries women still lack property rights. While access to micro credit has improved for women in rural areas, results have been mixed, due to the failure to address the "systemic impact that macroeconomic policies and frameworks have on women's livelihoods".¹² Women remain absent from most environmental decision-making bodies. Water privatization has further undermined women's management of natural resources.

Other developments since Beijing

11. The commitments made during the series of United Nations conferences in the 1990s culminated in the Millennium Declaration (2000). This distils the outcomes of these major summits and conferences, including the Beijing PFA, and represents a renewed global political commitment towards the promotion of sustainable development. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) intend to translate the Millennium Declaration into clear objectives with measurable targets. The Declaration confirms women's empowerment as a fundamental and cross-cutting theme for achieving sustainable development for all; however, the MDGs do not make gender equality an explicit central commitment, leaving its scope in the eight goals to the interpretation of Governments and institutions. Particularly, Goal 3, while addressing women's empowerment, defines targets rather narrowly, restricting them to aspects that are easily measurable. Goal 7, "environmental sustainability", omits the critical gender component. Applying a gender-lens to the five-year review of the MDGs, most countries did not report on gender aspects in Goal 7.¹³ Many observers,

⁶ Ibid. para. 31.

⁷ Ibid para 71. a & b.

⁸ Ibid. para. 431.

⁹ The United Nations General Assembly invited Member States to submit reports, based on a questionnaire, to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. See United Nations 2005, para. 10.

¹⁰ Ibid. para. 460.

¹¹ Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) 2005.

¹² Ibid, p. 22.

¹³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2005.

particularly from civil society, have criticized the MDGs for a lack of clarity in language and for their sectoral approach. Full integration of gender perspectives into the implementation of the MDGs and realizing synergies with the Beijing PFA and other international commitments are yet to be achieved.

12. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 reviewed and reaffirmed the ten-year progress of the Rio Summit commitments. It also called for urgent action to attain sustainable development worldwide. Its targets complement the MDGs and link them to the management of the natural resource base with a view to enhancing integration of the economic, social and environmental 'pillars' of sustainable development. Recognizing the correlation between poverty and land degradation, the WSSD identified the UNCCD as a key contributor to achieving poverty reduction targets in the context of the MDGs.

Achievements to date and obstacles remaining

13. The review process of the Beijing PFA, coordinated by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, reinforces the benchmark role of the PFA for achieving women's empowerment, rights and gender equality. While progress has been reported, serious obstacles remain to women enjoying their full human rights. In many countries women in urban centres may have substantially advanced in the socio-economic fields and more women are participating in the political arena. Conditions for women in rural areas appear not to have improved considerably or have, in many cases, deteriorated. The reports suggest that while Governments are willing to adopt the PFA and other international commitments, the political will to implement the obligations has been generally weak, creating the impression that mere lip service is paid to women's rights and gender equality. This has become particularly evident as regards environmental sustainability. Women continue to be discriminated against in rural regions. Despite their generally recognized essential contributions to food production and environmental sustainability, their continuing challenges include a lack of capacity and training, land tenure and rights access to financial and technical resources. Traditional barriers have further hampered advances. Gender-sensitive analysis tools, indicators and concrete targets need to be applied to assess current conditions and possible progress.

4. Beijing Platform for Action and the UNCCD

Principles and commitments

14. The UNCCD has the potential to become a model for gender mainstreaming in environmental conventions. Recognizing the essential role played by women in natural resource management and their extensive knowledge in environmental issues, Governments committed themselves through the UNCCD to creating an enabling environment that could support and strengthen the equal participation of women in combating desertification and preventing further degradation of their local ecosystems. While the UNCCD was negotiated prior to the Beijing Conference, the fundamental principles of gender equality and women's rights had coalesced in the early 1990s, as reflected in the UNCED commitments. Its Prologue recognizes "the important role played by women in regions affected by desertification and/or drought, particularly in rural areas of developing countries, and the importance of ensuring the full participation of both men and women at all levels in programmes to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought". Since the adoption of the UNCCD in 1994, the promotion of equality between men and women has formed an important element in many UNCCD-related activities at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

15. The UNCCD is anchored in four principles:

- The "bottom-up" approach;
- International partnerships and coordination;
- Government and civil society partnerships;
- Integration of combating desertification with poverty reduction strategies.

16. These principles echo and expand the three strategic objectives of the Beijing PFA. The participation of women in environmental decision-making at all levels is included in different articles of the UNCCD as well

as in its Prologue. As a legally binding framework, the UNCCD spells out the obligations of Parties. They are called upon to integrate women's concerns and aspirations into local and national strategies, programme planning and implementation. Gender-specific mechanisms to assess the impact of the development and environmental policies, as recommended in the PFA, while not explicitly provided for in the UNCCD, are nevertheless implied.

17. Among the principles, the "bottom-up" approach is recognized as an important innovation in strategy development aimed at ensuring that local populations' needs and aspirations are heard and integrated into action programmes. Emphasizing the importance of partnership, the UNCCD applies the PFA strategic objectives at programme level. While the PFA speaks of a "new era of international cooperation among Governments and peoples based on a spirit of partnership", the UNCCD principles have translated partnerships into systems of cooperation, in particular at the national level through the national action programmes (NAPs). At the international level, Party obligations also include partnerships between donor and affected countries, in particular for technical cooperation and financial support.

18. Partnerships with civil society represent an important component in UNCCD implementation. Governments are committed to "promote awareness and facilitate the participation of local populations, particularly women and youth, with the support of non-governmental organizations, in efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought" (Article 5(d)).

19. Women's essential role in sustainable development and poverty alleviation has been recognized since the series of World Conferences on Women. The importance of their full participation at all levels is emphasized in the UNCCD. Yet, the implementation provisions define women as one of the stakeholder groups, primarily at the local level. Special attention to women is called for when designing and implementing awareness-raising campaigns and participatory structures. As part of the local communities, they are to be involved in the planning and implementation of programmes to combat desertification and drought. Their capacity-strengthening needs are underlined while their knowledge in natural resource management is recognized. Nevertheless, although the UNCCD includes five Regional Annexes that spell out the implementation processes for the Convention, it is noteworthy that only the Annex for Africa makes any specific reference to women.¹⁴

20. Several core elements of the Beijing PFA have no direct equivalent in the UNCCD. Most important among these are sex-disaggregated data and gender-based analyses. They are acknowledged as crucial for a detailed assessment of women's poverty levels, their progress towards empowerment and their actual place in rural development. The UNCCD contains no comparable overall provision. In fact, although this had been recommended in early negotiations, it was dropped later.¹⁵ Similarly, issues relating to women's property rights, land tenure and access to credit have been recognized as critical for poverty-reduction strategies and essential for ensuring equality between men and women in rural development. There is no mention of these aspects in the UNCCD. Observers at the UNCCD negotiations pointed out that African and other developing countries requested that socio-economic causes be part of the definition of desertification in the UNCCD. "[I]t would be impossible to combat desertification unless issues such as external debt, international market conditions, exchange rate variations, pricing and trade policies, and poverty were adequately addressed (...). However, the industrialized countries were reluctant to adopt a definition that listed a whole range of socio-economic factors."¹⁶ Yet, such provisions would enhance the UNCCD as an effective tool for women's empowerment and participation in combating land degradation and poverty.

21. The Beijing objectives regarding mechanisms to assess the impact of development and environmental policies have the least concrete reflection in the UNCCD. There is a general understanding among Parties of the different impacts of desertification on women and men and of the specific burden on women. However, no gender-based analyses of current and new environmental and development strategies are prescribed by the UNCCD. The work programme of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) includes the development and monitoring of benchmarks and indicators. While indicators refer to assessing

¹⁴ National Action Programmes should favour "the increase in participation of local populations and communities, including women, farmers and pastoralists, and delegation to them of more responsibility for management". (Art. 8.2).

¹⁵ Knabe, F., Poulsen, L. 2004, p. 12.

¹⁶ Corell, E. 1999.

civil society participation, gender-specific data is suggested only “where needed”. There are currently no mechanisms at the regional or international level that would enable the monitoring of such policy impacts on women.

22. In conclusion, the analysis of the UNCCD shows that the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform Critical Area K “Women and the Environment” are echoed in the Convention. The UNCCD includes provisions that promote the recognition of women’s role as partners in combating desertification and their needs for capacity-building and training. As a legal framework, the UNCCD cannot prescribe national implementation strategies to a level of specificity that would result in specific interventions and actions. This applies in particular to objective (c) the development of mechanisms to assess the impact on women of policies. It is left to the national context to apply the objectives and principles. So far, the Conference of the Parties (COP) has not established any detailed reporting criteria within the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

UNCCD implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

23. The Convention is implemented at the national level primarily through the NAPs and supported by subregional and regional action programmes (SRAPs, RAPs). NAPs are intended to represent partnerships between national authorities, representatives from civil society, such as NGOs and grassroots organizations, research institutions, the private sector and, in some cases, representatives from the international community including donors. National multi-stakeholder coordination is also an essential feature in the PFA. Stakeholders are called upon to strengthen their efforts to improve the effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes and monitoring mechanisms to ensure implementation of the PFA.

24. UNCCD provisions on NAP processes identify women as a stakeholder group that should be supported and promoted. NAPs shall, in fact, “provide for effective participation at the local, national and regional levels of non-governmental organizations and local populations, both women and men, particularly resource users, including farmers and pastoralists and their representative organizations, in policy planning, decision-making, and implementation and review of national action programmes.” (Article 10.2 (f)). These provisions mirror the respective strategic directions of the Beijing PFA.

25. The national reports follow a set of guidelines, based on UNCCD principles, issued by the UNCCD secretariat in the form of a **Help Guide**. This requires Governments to review, among other things, the participatory approaches in the structures and mechanisms established for implementing the Convention, with a special focus on national coordination bodies or steering committees. This includes reviewing the methods used to identify stakeholders. The regularly updated **Help Guide** reminds Governments of the need for women’s participation in the NAP processes. It should be noted, however, that the number of specific references to gender and women in the **Help Guide** was reduced from eight in the first version to only two in the latest version (2003). Here, women are identified as a stakeholder group in “Participatory processes in support of preparation and implementation of action programmes, particularly processes involving civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations.” The respective indicator asks for the “effective participation of actors in defining national priorities”.¹⁷

26. Many country reports refer to stakeholder consultations at the design stage of the NAPs, usually through a national steering committee that includes different line ministries and representatives from civil society groups, including women. While many countries plan concrete activities to promote women’s participation, not many national reports provide details on how these initiatives will be realized.¹⁸ There is also little information provided regarding the participation of women’s groups during ongoing consultations for programme implementation and subsequent monitoring. Situations vary considerably; for example, in some countries the institutional and legal framework needs to be established to institute gender equality. Some countries have built on existing programmes for gender mainstreaming, established to implement the PFA,¹⁹ to strengthen the gender component in the NAP process. For others gender mainstreaming in NAP

¹⁷ ICCD/CRIC(3)/INF.3, p. 20.

¹⁸ Poulsen, L. 2003.

¹⁹ Usually referred to as “Women Machineries”, the national structures in charge of follow-up to the Beijing PFA.

implementation continues to be a theoretical idea rather than a reality. Overall, reports stress a lack of financial resources, including from donor countries and international cooperation partners.

27. Mirroring the PFA in the area of targeting interventions to strengthen women's capacity, the UNCCD advocates the introduction of support to stakeholder groups, in particular women, to enable and support the full and equal participation of dryland populations in national partnerships. This is reflected in the commitment to "promote, as appropriate, capacity building: through the full participation at all levels of local people, particularly at the local level, especially women and youth, with the cooperation of non-governmental and local organizations".²⁰ The article defines capacity building as "institution building, training and development of relevant local and national capacities - in efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought".

28. A number of countries, for example, India and Viet Nam, mention plans for the capacity-building and training of stakeholders including women. Uganda's third national report (2004) is quite specific regarding women's participation, gender balance and efforts to overcome continuing barriers; in decision-making committees, for instance, composition is aimed at 30 per cent women. Recognizing the difficulties, capacity development needs are spelled out including gender sensitivity and mainstreaming of gender issues in sustainable land management. It also lists best practices identified through an evaluation process. India's second national report (2002) highlights the progress made towards gender equality by reserving one third of elected seats in local governing institutions for women. It also stresses efforts to increase women's access to critical inputs and natural resources. Some countries, including Zambia, Tunisia and Kenya, have established special budget lines in their NAPs for activities to strengthen the role of women and for gender mainstreaming. Such budget allocations, however, are modest and usually represent less than three per cent of the overall NAP budget.

29. From most country reports it is difficult to assess how much concrete support has been provided for women and other community stakeholders. El Salvador's first report (2000) stresses that there are few barriers to women's participation and, accordingly, a "gender approach has been spread in the country and certain awareness has been achieved".²¹ Without a gender-sensitive analysis and related data, monitoring of actual progress in this regard is not possible. It appears evident that the absence of concrete time-bound targets and indicators, that had made monitoring of the Beijing PFA difficult, continues also to be an obstacle in monitoring UNCCD implementation.

30. The participation of women in the UNCCD is not to be limited to the local level. Again, there is little information as to how the representation of women in the UNCCD context is realized at policy levels at local, national, regional and international consultations. Evidence suggests that the number of women representatives dwindles towards higher levels of the hierarchy. So while women might participate or be consulted at the local level in planning activities of the NAPs, their representation in the ongoing national monitoring process is not reported. The proportion of women in delegations to regional/international meetings is modest, and participation in the COPs continues to be male dominated.

5. Learning lessons

Challenges and opportunities

31. The governing body of the UNCCD, the COP, and the subsidiary bodies, the CST and the CRIC, also play a leadership role in terms of gender balance and women's participation. Up to now, however, their composition has not lived up to expectations.²² The respective bureaux fall far short as regards gender parity. Similarly, nominations to the roster of experts and to the recently established Group of Experts of the CST demonstrate a strong gender bias against women. While civil society representatives have succeeded through consistent lobbying in strengthening their active role in the proceedings of the COP and other forums, women have not been able to achieve comparable results. Civil society groups, while overall integrating

²⁰ UNCCD, Art. 19.1(a).

²¹ El Salvador 1st Report English Summary.

²² See the study by Knabe, F., Poulsen, L. 2004.

more women into their delegations, are nowhere near a gender balance as regards women's participation. Over the years, progress has been made and more national delegations are conscious of the need to include women delegates and to create an enabling environment that promotes women into leadership positions in UNCCD consultations. Some countries have taken affirmative action to address the situation and established quota systems to improve gender balance in delegations and committees. The Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification may consider suggesting a specific mechanism whereby women's representation in official sessions could be improved or monitored. This would reflect similar provisions in the PFA.

32. One of the CST priorities is the formulation and monitoring of "benchmarks and indicators". So far, benchmarks monitoring civil society participation in UNCCD implementation programmes are rarely applied beyond the initial NAP consultation, and in most cases remain theoretical. Indicators for gender balance and women's involvement in UNCCD implementation processes have not yet been clearly established.

33. One of the "key thematic topics" of the CRIC focuses on "Participatory processes involving civil society and non-governmental and community-based organizations". Gender issues are not usually highlighted in the discussions, although they are an essential component of this thematic issue. The importance of the CRIC in terms of setting examples and promoting best practices should be strengthened. A gender lens has not been used up to now but would yield important information and provide lessons learned and recommendations. The CRIC mechanisms could become more prominent as instruments for monitoring gender mainstreaming and the role of women in the implementation of the Convention. As a matter of priority, it would be important to have a special segment at each CRIC session dedicated to the follow-up of the UNCCD commitments regarding gender equality and women's empowerment in line with the strategic objectives of the Beijing PFA. The formulation of appropriate benchmarks and indicators should become a priority. Suggestions for the full integration of issues relating to women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming could also be included in future versions of the *Help Guides*. Gender experts from other fields could be invited to animate these discussions.

34. The multisectoral holistic approach to sustainable development, recommended by the PFA, can be important when relating the NAPs to macro-economic planning processes. There is an acknowledged need to promote close links between the NAPs and the strategies for combating poverty, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which currently determine the structure of development efforts in many countries. Most PRSPs are not gender sensitive and ignore women's specific challenges and opportunities in sustainable development. Engendering PRSPs and other development and environmental strategies would support the efforts made by countries to implement the UNCCD on the basis of women's full participation. The national reports stress this requirement but do not always describe how close links between NAPs and the other strategic development policies can be established.²³ Successful strategies could include "mainstreaming" the NAPs and treating them as an effective tool for poverty alleviation for women and men in rural communities.

35. The PFA review process established that current attempts to cost the objective of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment are hampered by the paucity of accurate data as well as the related financing of programmes. This suggests the need for greater investment in developing appropriate indicators and incorporating them into official statistical efforts at the national, regional and international levels. Experience in UNCCD implementation parallels PFA implementation in this regard. While stressing the need to implement the UNCCD from a gender equality perspective, it is important to ensure that this does not preclude the allocation of special resources in programming and budgeting for women's special requirements.

²³ ICDD/CRIC(4)/3, para. 16.

6. The road ahead

36. Government responses to the questionnaire on the Beijing PFA review process, and civil society reports that have commented on the success of the national coordination processes, suggest that the main strategies for the advancement of women, gender mainstreaming, gender-sensitive budgeting and policy making, have to be coordinated with key decision makers (such as ministers of finance and parliaments) at the highest levels to ensure adequate integration of gender perspectives into implementation and monitoring processes, as well as sufficient resource allocation and impact.²⁴

37. UNCCD implementation requires a similar approach. The national coordination bodies should include all the relevant ministries including the minister for women's development, the gender focal point, or equivalents. Coordinated approaches will enable the systematic upscaling of investment in women's development (starting with those whose needs are most urgent), prioritizing areas identified in the UNCCD and the Beijing PFA. Among the necessary next steps at the national level are:

- To include explicit gender equality objectives in all key strategic areas of the poverty reduction strategies, environmental policies and the NAPs, and to allocate the necessary financial and human resources to the associated budgetary expenditure and monitoring;
- To support gender-sensitive budgeting initiatives at local, national and international levels, and to develop and apply gender-sensitive methodology accurately to measure, assess and track the impact and effectiveness of investment in women and the effectiveness of that investment for reducing gender inequality. To apply systematic gender-sensitive funding mechanisms, including National Desertification Funds, at the national level;
- To ensure the achievement of gender equality in UNCCD implementation through targeted funding by Governments and donors for gender equality as an explicit development goal in its own right, as well as for ensuring that gender equality results and processes are identified and supported in all other development priorities;
- To provide access, financial support, capacity-building and education programmes at local, national and international levels in order to encourage women to participate in partnerships, decision-making and monitoring processes of the UNCCD and related initiatives. Gender-sensitivity training for women and men should be included in the capacity-strengthening initiatives;
- To promote significant progress toward gender equity and the participation of women in decision-making bodies, and to enhance the sensitization of representatives in those bodies towards gender balance in panels, committees and bureaux of the UNCCD governing bodies;
- To document the gender aspects and implications of global environmental change, from the standpoint of the issues relating to the UNCCD and the other environmental conventions, as well as gender-differentiated impacts of environmental insecurity.
- To train gender catalysts (men and women) to monitor the integration of gender issues and to ensure that they become operationally visible. To train women in leadership, managerial, technical and related skills.
- To incorporate a gender dimension in policy research, including criteria and indicators for monitoring and evaluation, and the development of sex-disaggregated data.
- To support the creation of structures that aid Governments to support gender-sensitive initiatives. To emphasize practical skills and tools for bringing women and gender issues into the mainstream of policy-making.
- To support the coordination of women's activities between participating groups, and exchange and linking at the national, regional and global levels.²⁵

38. At the international and bilateral partnership levels, technical support and, in particular, financial resources need to be substantially increased to support the national initiatives and to overcome major bottlenecks in the implementation of the UNCCD.

²⁴ DAW 2005.

²⁵ Adapted from DAW 2005.

7. Concluding comments

39. The UNCCD has been identified as an important mechanism to implement the objectives of the WSSD by bringing poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability into an integrated action framework. It has also been recognized as a major tool to implement the MDGs by incorporating the gender component into poverty-reduction and environmental protection strategies. This document demonstrates that the UNCCD can provide a major strategic framework for the implementation of the Beijing PFA in dryland regions.

40. The UNCCD principles of multi-level partnerships and the bottom-up approach also reflect a key component of the PFA. The involvement of women in all aspects of programme planning and implementation and their participation at all levels is recognized as an essential strategy towards gender equality and towards poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability in the drylands. The role of civil society as an active partner in awareness raising and capacity strengthening is a key component of the implementation of the NAPs, as it is for further implementation of the Beijing Plan for Action.

41. The successful implementation of both sets of strategic objectives will depend on the political will of all stakeholders and in particular of Governments. The allocation of adequate resources has to be ensured by affected parties and their international cooperation partners so that the action programmes can be realized.

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