



Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification

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

Beijing Statement

The participants at the International Conference on Women and Desertification, having convened in Beijing, China from 29 May to 1 June 2006 within the framework of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD),

Recall that:

- i) The Fourth Conference on Women held in Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995 recognized *among other things* the contribution of women to sustainable management of natural resources, and acknowledged at the same time the lack of recognition of their role; the Conference called for strategic action to be taken by the international community;
- ii) Paragraph 20 of the Millennium Declaration resolves to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways of combating poverty, hunger and disease and of stimulating development that is truly sustainable, as do Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 on the empowerment of women, and paragraphs 58 and 59 of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/1 concerning the 2005 World Summit Outcome;
- iii) Decision 11 of the 23rd Ordinary Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), on gender equality in the field of the environment, calls for equal participation in decision-making, gender mainstreaming in environmental policies and programmes, and assessment of the effects on women of environmental policies and their implementation;
- iv) The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a legally-binding instrument ratified by 191 country Parties and an enabling framework for promoting actions towards enhancing the conditions of women in regions affected by desertification and drought, particularly in the rural areas of developing countries (UNCCD prologue);
- v) It is a matter of urgency to link the UNCCD and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in order to face the urgent tasks ahead in addressing challenges to women in areas affected by drought and desertification.
- vi) The United Nations General Assembly Resolution which established 2006 as the IYDD, encourages countries to undertake special initiatives in observance of the Year.

Reaffirm the importance of joint efforts on the part of the international community in combating desertification as a global issue, establishing effective financial, technical transfer and capacity-building mechanisms and mainstreaming desertification into national sustainable development strategies and planning in order to enhance implementation of the UNCCD.

Underline:

- i) The key role played by women as the main stakeholders in managing natural

resources and food production and in meeting household needs, such as energy and water in rural areas affected by desertification and drought;

- ii) That women are severely affected by land degradation and desertification, making their conditions the most difficult and insecure in all societies;
- iii) That women in areas affected by drought and desertification are generally engaged in subsistence and small economies and are therefore more vulnerable to the negative impacts of global economic, technological and cultural transformation processes;
- iv) That the theme of women and desertification has been addressed specifically for the first time in an international forum;

Submit to the attention of countries Parties to the UNCCD, international organizations, civil society and the private sector the following considerations and recommendations:

A. Institutional arrangements and legislation, including policies and/or strategies

1. Governments at all levels and development agencies (multi-lateral, bilateral and national) should invest in training and capacity building aiming at effective women's participation and the monitoring of government accountability in policy implementation and commitments made.

2. The participants *call upon* Parties to incorporate the applicable gender dimension in National Action Programmes (NAPs) implementation, as prescribed by the BPFA, and in other relevant frameworks or environmental strategies; they also encourage national focal points to seek synergies, partnerships and networking incorporating the gender dimension into civil society, grassroots, academic, economic and business organizations.

3. The participants *recommend* the preparation and application of methodologies/ guidelines with a view to incorporating the gender dimension into reporting activities and revising the existing set of benchmarks and indicators, in order to include it appropriately.

4. The participants *recommend* relevant international institutions to share lessons learned and experiences of gender mainstreaming.

5. The participants *call upon* Parties to set adequate quotas on women's representation, in all relevant decision-making bodies at all levels within their countries, particularly in the rural areas, and to increase women's representation in relevant international forums.

6. The participants *encourage* the creation of a network of women in areas affected by drought and desertification, and invite the Global Mechanism (GM) and other interested organizations to support it. This network should involve all governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals involved in combating desertification.

B. Main priorities for action

7. The participants at the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification *invite* Parties and relevant national, regional and international institutions to take into consideration in their plans and programmes for sustainable development and environmental resources management the following subjects that have been identified as major priorities for women in areas affected by drought and desertification:

a) *Education*

- i) The promotion of literacy, education and skill development and the dissemination of information, in areas affected by drought and desertification, with due priority given to equal opportunities for women.
- ii) Improvements in women's participation in decision-making by the promotion of education in areas affected by drought and desertification, particularly by:
 - Documenting and disseminating effective local knowledge and oral traditions for combating desertification that respond to women's needs;
 - Facilitating the participation of women in training and capacity-building, through means such as day-care centres, long-distance learning, and access to information technologies;
 - Improving women's access to higher education with special fellowships, preferential provision in access to schools etc.
- iii) The provision of non-formal education through technical and managerial skill acquisition training for women in areas affected by drought and desertification.

b) *Health*

- i) Promotion of the use, based on traditional knowledge, of multi-purpose trees and crops for the production of medicines and food of high nutritive value;
- ii) Promotion of a specific study on the nutritional capacity of areas affected by drought and desertification products and ways and means of improving the nutritional status of the younger generation, taking into consideration existing research in this field;
- iii) Addressing water availability and quality in local, national and regional health action programmes and promoting simple and cost-effective technologies to improve them;
- iv) Consideration of health indicators, such as maternal diseases, child nutrition, family planning etc., in the UNCCD reporting process;
- v) Recognition of the negative effects of HIV/AIDS on communities living in areas affected by desertification and drought, and particularly on women, leading also to further land degradation and poverty, and of the need to explore effective strategies to diminish this negative impact through joint efforts promoting women's active involvement;
- vi) The provision of adequate reproductive health facilities for women in areas affected by drought and desertification, in order to reduce maternal and child mortality.

c) *Management of natural resources, particularly land and water*

- i) Women should be empowered to take informed decisions on the planning and integrated management of water resources, including non-renewable water resources (i.e. for agricultural, domestic and industrial uses);
- ii) Decentralization of forest, land and water resources management to local communities should be encouraged in order to ensure women's participation in the related policy-making processes at local level;

- iii) Rural communities which are involved in the conservation and protection of water, forest and land resources should benefit from payment for environmental services; incomes should be primarily invested in environment protection programmes, with the active involvement of women;
- iv) Technologies for water conservation and management should be improved to respond to women's needs, particularly - *inter alia* - through the creation of small reservoirs and dams, the reuse and recycling of water for domestic and garden use, efficient water transportation, local desalinization, micro-irrigation, atmospheric water capture and appropriate modern and traditional technologies and local materials for water harvesting and soil conservation, taking into account the protection of non-renewable water resources;
- v) There is a need for the management of water, forest and land resources, to be based on an integrated, gender-oriented and ecosystem approach and for the collection, and dissemination, where appropriate, of best practices and lessons learned in different regions;
- vi) There is a need to ensure that women have access to land and land resources including land ownership rights.

d) *Energy*

- i) Women living in resource-poor areas, should be ensured access to technology, and to the appropriate use of energy sources, through:
 - Investment in research and the development of affordable alternative energy sources, such as renewable energy specifically designed for women's needs;
 - Dissemination of information on alternative sources of energy, with the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
 - Training, information exchange and skills building at the local level, including hardware support;
 - Adaptation to, and acceptance of, new appropriate technologies.
- ii) Renewable energy technologies should be improved, such as photovoltaic energy for domestic use and water pumping and transport, biogas and biomass production in small-scale systems to provide efficient cooking stoves and heating, and aeolian energy where appropriate, according to local conditions and women's needs;
- iii) Opportunities for income-generating activities should be encouraged, based on development of renewable energies;
- iv) Women should be involved in sustainable biomass use and production, taking into account the protection of natural forests, the use of multi-purpose agroforestry species and fast-growing trees, whenever appropriate, in accordance with traditional knowledge and local biodiversity conservation;
- v) Through the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) a specific study should be carried out with a view to providing a better understanding of the potentials of renewable energies for providing equal opportunities for women;
- vi) Public/private and community partnerships should be developed with a view to creating new funding opportunities and financial instruments for the promotion of gender-sensitive use of renewable energy;

- vii) Women should be enabled to assess the full potential of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), increasing their access to information and providing them with the opportunity to make informed decisions;
- viii) Promote the special value of CDM projects in drought and desertification-affected areas should be promoted among the governing bodies of the Kyoto Protocol, in particular those involving women participation.

ii) *Food security*

- i) There is a need to build on traditional knowledge and appropriate technologies for food production, conservation and value addition in areas affected by drought and desertification, including energy supplies;
- ii) The promotion of research into, and dissemination of information on, the value, use and processing of local plant varieties;
- iii) Promotion of the full utilization of all agricultural products and plant components, such as fruit and fibre, as well as the conservation of local crop varieties, through the training of women and the sharing of experience among local communities;
- iv) The development of urban agriculture in order to increase food supplies and improve quality of life;
- v) Facilitation of women's access to market information, agricultural technologies, transport facilities and micro-finance opportunities;
- vi) Expansion of the concept of food security into livelihood security so that it incorporates employment, income and social security in addition to food;
- vii) Encouragement of public awareness and capacity-building activities in order to reduce the impact of globalization on small economies and on the biodiversity of areas affected by drought and desertification.

C. Funding Mechanisms

The participants at the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification:

8. *Recommend* that economic policies supported by the international community provide an enabling environment for national consultations, in order to encourage consultation with local communities and to ensure the participation of women on issues that directly affect their lives.

9. *Call on* donor countries and international agencies, particularly the Global Environment Facility (GEF), to provide, on a regular basis, additional funds earmarked for women's capacity-building, as a way of improving their participation in the decision-making processes at all levels within UNCCD implementation and/or other initiatives to combat desertification.

10. *Invite* the GM, civil society and private sector to facilitate resource mobilization for promoting projects for women empowerment.

11. *Call on* national Governments to allocate funds within NAPs for women's capacity building in order to facilitate their full implementation, to and report back to the COP on this matter.

D. Implementation

The participants at the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification:

12. *Encourage* the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG) to take fully into consideration the recommendations of the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification in the development of its long-term strategy for UNCCD implementation, and to establish clear targets towards the equal participation of women in UNCCD implementation.

13. *Call upon* Parties and national bodies responsible for the implementation of the UNCCD to design, implement and support project activities and programmes relating to women's empowerment in areas affected by drought and desertification, with particular regard to projects in rural areas, and to include the gender lens appropriately.

14. *Invite* donor countries to support initiatives using micro-credit tools, taking women's needs into consideration.

15. *Promote* the establishment and strengthening of local women's organizations in order to enhance women's capacity in decision-making and participatory processes, and to strengthen these groups through technical and management training;

16. *Invite* the CST to include the gender dimension in its programme of work.

E. Monitoring

The participants at the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification:

17. *Invite* Parties to include sex-disaggregated data in designing and assessing activities to combat desertification, and in that regard request the CST to assist in identifying sex-disaggregated datasets and indicators, taking into consideration similar monitoring tools.

18. *Invite* Parties to consider establishing at COP 8, ways and means of monitoring progress in the implementation of the gender dimensions in combating desertification, including *inter alia* the possibility of organizing a follow-up event to the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification.

19. *Invite* the UNCCD secretariat to circulate the output of the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification to the national focal points, with a view to encouraging them to disseminate and/or promote the results among their networks at all levels.

The participants at the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification finally:

Invite the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD to consider the Beijing Statement with a view to taking further action in respect of the recommendations contained therein.

Express their deep gratitude to the Governments of Algeria, China and Italy for having organized the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification.