

**LEGAL AND POLICY APPROACHES AT LINKING THE  
DESERTIFICATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA IN  
NIGERIA**

by

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The definition of desertification adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 is land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors including climatic variations and human activities. This definition clearly identifies climate variation as a direct causal factor in desertification and, which has, over the past several decades, emerged as one of the major research themes in climate study. The Convention to Combat Desertification recognises that there is an inexorable interaction between desertification and the climate. This connection, and therefore, emphasises the need for integrated cross-sectoral responses to the problem of land degradation. Its article 8 refers to the need for co-ordination with other conventions, in particular the conventions on biodiversity and climate change. These other conventions, though possessing independent administrative mechanisms, have considerable overlap in terms of the content of the issues they address, some of the purposes they intend to achieve, and in many of the ways in which they approach their respective goals. Because of this connection, there have, increasingly, been efforts to encourage an integrated approach at international, regional and national levels in addressing the common elements in desertification and climate change, as well as biological diversity. Such approaches are expected to help in reinforcing institutional co-operation between related organisations and sectors in ultimately dealing with the emergent problems common to them.

This paper will focus on identifying some of the key issues and challenges and the long-term trends linking the climate change and desertification agenda. It will look at the institutional framework and consider how the Nigerian government and agencies have responded to those challenges, the major constraints and some of the key lessons learned. It will particularly focus on the principal legal provisions and approaches, policies and strategies being or to be adopted in implementing both the UNFCCC and CCD and their impact on the Forests. The paper will further seek to analyse these efforts within the context of international approaches and initiatives with regard to the collective implementation of the respective conventions. Finally, it will look at what more the government and other stakeholders, including NGOs can do to help communities and the entire country effectively implement the letters and spirit of the UNFCCC and CCD in a more integrated or co-ordinated cross-sectoral manner.

## **GEO-POLITICAL CONTEXT**

Nigeria signed the Desertification Convention on October 30, 1994 and ratified it on July 8, 1997. With an estimated population of over 120 million, it is a federation of 36 states divided administratively into 774 local government areas. 11 states in the northern half of the country fall within the Sudano-Sahelian zone of West Africa that is now seriously affected by various forms of land degradation, including desertification and drought. According to some estimates, Nigeria has altogether, over 350,000km<sup>2</sup> of her landmass exposed to advancing deserts. In about six states, an estimated 50 to 75% of the land is subject to substantial wind erosion and desertification. The most affected areas are going through a profound crisis, especially as regards the survival of its rural communities and the conservation of its natural resources. Rapid population growth has already increased the pressure on the natural resources base, including fuelwood, grazing land for wildlife and livestock and arable land.

The increasing profile of climate change as an issue of growing global concern has drawn tremendous attention to the role of Nigeria's gas flaring in the build-up of greenhouse gases. Nigeria is number one on the top ten list of countries flaring gas and, with more than 80 per cent of the associated gas ensuing in the course of oil production flared, accounts for more than a quarter of the gas the world flares and vents. This represents a substantial loss of income to the nation as well as significant contribution to global greenhouse emissions. The oil and gas industries are also the sources of other forms of pollution affecting the biological diversity and causing habitat destruction, both on land, in the wetlands and the marine environment.

The demographic, agriculture and environmental problems in Nigeria are closely related in a nexus of mutually reinforcing cause-and-effects links. Key linkages are found in the fact that over 70% of this population reside in the rural areas deriving their subsistence and income from agriculture. Land degradation, deforestation, food insecurity, lack of access to safe water, loss of biodiversity, compounded by climatic variability, are invariably some of the concerns that arise from this situation. This rural poor are most exposed to the emergent dangers, especially climate change, and are unable or unwilling to invest in natural resource management and conservation as they are driven by desperation to further plunder the woodland, natural and other forest resources which lead to further desertification and, in turn, compound the climate change dynamics.

In addressing these issues, the country faces several major challenges, which include:

- i) Land-based challenges relating to the environmental impacts of climate change which in its extreme is the aggravating desert encroachment in the northern part of the country with phenomenal southward progression; and the threatened southern low lying Atlantic Ocean coastline covering an area of about 153,000sq. km providing home for some 23 million people; virgin mangrove with abundant biodiversity, oil, gas and solid minerals;
- ii) Population based problems of over 120 million people, a large percentage of which are resource-poor rural people whose poverty burden will be worsened further by climate change and result in greater human misery and environmental degradation.
- iii) Economic contradictions and paradox of a nation largely dependent on revenue from fossil fuel production (Adewoye, 1998).

## **THE DESERTIFICATION – CLIMATE CHANGE NEXUS.**

Desertification is both an evolutionary and complex process but the result of several factors, including human behaviour, and brings about chain reactions affecting all elements of the ecosystem. Since arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas are climatically defined, any change in climate which results in an expansion or contraction of these areas will alter the extent of the area in which desertification can be considered to occur. (Kelly 1993)

It has been, more or less, scientifically established that human activities, which impact the surface in drylands, are influencing the local and regional climates and have, in turn, and exacerbated the desertification processes (Balling, 1993). These human activities impact the surface and the atmosphere in drylands principally by:

- (a) reducing vegetation cover (by overgrazing, cultivation, deforestation)
- (b) increasing the surface albedo;
- (c) decreasing the roughness thereby increasing wind speeds;
- (d) altering soil moisture patterns; and
- (e) burning vegetation and dislodging dust at the surface.

These same activities lead to a decrease in vegetation and soil moisture. The resultant changes cause a warming at the surface that may destabilise the atmosphere and enhance the changes for convective rainfall. The disappearance of forest trees is often one of the most visible consequences of desertification, as well as being one of the determining and exacerbating factors. In addition, desertification plays a role in altering the sources and sinks of greenhouse gases, contributing to global warming. Dryland degradation is likely to limit the local carbon sink by reducing the carbon stored in ecosystems and, as vegetation dies and soil is disturbed, carbon emissions will increase (Kelly, 1993).

Like many other processes, the role of desertification may not be substantial on a global scale compared to, say, the contribution of fossil fuel use. Nevertheless, in terms of the carbon budgets of the countries most affected, slowing or reversing the process of desertification could play a major part in reducing their national contribution to global warming, offsetting emission growth in other sectors (Kelly, 1993).

Although there is still an ongoing debate on the climate impact of increasing greenhouse gases, many experts argue that we cannot delay policy actions until the scientific debate is resolved. The rationale is that many of the mitigation strategies aimed at combating desertification produce a win-win situation. They argue that, apart from halting or even reversing the desertification process, any increase in vegetation in drylands can uptake atmospheric carbon dioxide, thereby helping to alleviate the build-up of the major anthropo-generated greenhouse gas. The same increase in vegetation will likely increase soil moisture levels, cool any rising temperatures, and possibly increase rainfall totals. These scientists are able to cite considerable theoretical and empirical support for their arguments (Balling, 1993).

## **THE NEED FOR CO-ORDINATION**

With increasing international focus on the implementation phase of the various international agreements, one of the questions that invariably arise is how domestic implementation of the relevant governing instruments can be facilitated by harmonising their requirements, with particular emphasis on reporting, assessment and monitoring obligations. Examination of the instruments shows very similar approaches toward their global environmental goals. Maximising synergies in activities to implement the respective agreements, therefore, requires the activities of these institutions to be co-ordinated in such a way as to avoid unnecessary costs and avoid duplication, as well as to exploit comparative advantage. Co-ordination at the international level will, undoubtedly, assist a concerted national approach by providing integrated policy guidance, coherent programming of work, co-ordinated scientific inputs, and rationalisation of financial and technical support to promote national implementation (McKenzie, 1993). The various agreements establish a commitment to gather, assess and share requisite information and facilities necessary to move forward in both diagnosis and

in remedial phases, to create domestic skills and build problem solving capacity to address the complex scientific and institutional problems, and to provide adequate planning bases (Bell, 1993).

## **POLICY ENVIRONMENT**

Both desertification and climate change issues are affected by a wide array of policies in many sectors and the ways these policies affect them are also varied, ranging from indirect creation of incentives for unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, to direct requirements, or lack thereof, for the management of these resources. The most significant impact of the policy environment on these areas tend to result from perverse or unintended effects of policies in other sectors, which directly or indirectly have adverse consequences for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. For instance, policies intended to boost agricultural production or stimulate economic development have led to the expansion of the production of export monocultures at the expense of more diversified traditional systems or through clearing of forested land (Biodiversity Support Programme, 1993). Commercial logging have also been expanded for the same reasons. So also, have the effects of policy changes induced by some multi-lateral financial agencies engendered negative conditions that have exacerbated the overall environmental degradation in the country.

Land and other legal issues related to land ownership and land use are additional important areas in which the national policy environment can contribute to destructive patterns of landscape change. Customary land tenure practices that were more appropriate to local conditions have often been ignored by the state or have been replaced by laws and policies that encourage deforestation.

By Section 1 of the Land Use Act of 1978, all land comprised in the territory of each State is vested in the Governor of that State and such land is stated as being held in trust and administered for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians. In accordance with the provisions of the Decree, the Governor can grant either certificate of occupancy or rights of occupancy to individuals or groups for use and enjoyment. In the same breadth, by Section 28 of the Act, the Governor may also revoke rights of occupancy for overriding public interest.

The Act effectively removed ownership of land from the citizens, even though it claims to recognise communal and family forms of tenure which are derived from customary rights of occupancy and which confer control, the right to use and enjoy land, or otherwise alienate same in accordance with customary laws and practices. In this regime, however, communities can only have customary rights of occupancy which are subject to the overriding title of the Federal or State governments. By implication, therefore, it effectively defines the rights to determine how, when and by who land can be utilised either for commercial or subsistence purposes. This is likely to remove any real sense of ownership and might, therefore, reduce commitment to invest fully in conservation efforts with respect to such land as occupiers try to maximise use in the short term and, as a result, overstress it.

Faced with worsening economic crisis, the overall policy thrust in the country has been that of economic development and maximisation of the exploitation of natural resources. However, the growing international concern and programmes, combined with internal pressures have necessitated a general redirection of policies towards a more sustainable development oriented bearing. These changes are also induced by the considerable changes occurring in the ecological environment and in

the socio-economic setting of the country as result of both natural and anthropogenic transformations that include, quite significantly, exploitation of natural resources and unsustainable agricultural practices.

In the country as whole, assigning institutional mandates for multisectoral problems has always been a significant obstacle because government departments and agencies are organised along classical sectoral lines without effective mechanisms for handling complex issues that overlap agency jurisdictions (Biodiversity Support Group, 1993). Moreover, since both climate change and desertification are very complex and multidisciplinary issues, they raise issues as to jurisdiction and pose a serious challenge to line institutions in addressing the related problems.

The national legal and policy framework is central to the effective functioning of institutions for implementation of the various agreements. Although a number of environmental laws geared towards protecting the environment exist, they had been poorly enforced while the appropriate policy response and action programmes to address these problems have not been easily brought into compatible focus. Past efforts have, on the whole, failed to reverse the direction of the downward spiral that is driven by the forces of the socio-economic-environment nexus. In as much as institutional responses to the various international agreements at all levels do recognise the interdependence of geo-ecological functions, little has been done by way of deliberate co-ordination of relevant institutions. Part of the explanation appears to be that past efforts have been pursued too narrowly along conventional sectoral lines while crucial cross-sectoral linkages and synergies have been ignored. The holistic, cross-cutting nature of the agreements demands co-ordination of resources and policy-making.

The Federal Environmental Protection Agency is the body empowered to oversee environmental matters in the country, even though several other departments and ministries have mandates that fall squarely within the activities surrounding desertification and climate change, notably the Federal Department of Forestry.

The current Federal Government's policy on environment and desertification is anchored on the 1989 National Policy on the Environment. Among the strategies proposed in the policy, include:

- ? ? establishing guidelines for land use and soil management, and the necessary framework to implement them;
- ? ? developing through research, sustainable agro-forestry techniques, for checking the spread of desertification;
- ? ? increasing public awareness on the danger of soil degradation, its seriousness, causes and remedies; etc.

These provisions have been criticised on a number of grounds, especially the shortcomings arising from inadequate consultations and co-ordination among groups, agencies and ministries whose activities impinge on the environment and the fact that the solution to desertification involves much more than "developing ... techniques" (Okpara, 1997).

With respect to climate change, the National Policy on the Environment recognises the predominant role of energy production and use as a major contributor of greenhouse gases and, therefore, the need to ensure a balanced mix of various energy types which will be compatible with sound environmental practice. Strategies proposed include:

- ? ? Encouraging the use of energy forms that are environmentally safe and sustainable;
- ? ? Monitoring and controlling the level of by-products of energy production and use such as CO, NO<sub>x</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub> and non-methane hydro-carbons, thereby reducing the greenhouse effects; etc.

The National Policy on the Environment then states that: “A viable national mechanism for co-operation, co-ordination and regular consultation, as well as the harmonious management of policy formulation and implementation process requires the establishment of effective institutions and linkages within and among the various tiers and levels of government...”

The Policy further states that the government will, among others:

- ? ? Enhance co-operation among all tiers of government in environmental protection, planning, monitoring and enforcement;
- ? ? Ensure multi-disciplinary and intersectoral collaboration in environmental management, through institutions such as the National Resources Conservation Council and various other technical advisory committees;
- ? ? Establish within each State, appropriate State-level consultative and co-ordination machinery on environmental matters;

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR APPROPRIATE CO-ORDINATION**

Prior to the Convention and, to some extent, recently, different Agencies or departments have had mandates and responsibilities with different aspects of desertification and climate change issues. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency Decree No. 58 of 1988 (as amended) confers the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) with the responsibility for the protection and development of the environment and biodiversity conservation and sustainable development of Nigeria's natural resources, thereby making it the focal point on environmental and related issues. Nevertheless, the principal line ministry with respect to desertification has been the Ministry of Agriculture through the department of forestry, informed apparently by the view that the issue was basically a matter of loss of forest cover, exacerbated primarily by inappropriate agricultural practices. Recently, however, more attention is being paid to the issue by the Agency with a view to harmonising its handling of environmental issues.

Section 4 (d) of the FEPA Decree, mandates the Agency to “co-operate with Federal and State Ministries, Local Government Councils, statutory bodies and research agencies on matters and facilities relating to environmental protection”. Policy initiatives have been adopted for the establishment and maintenance of Environmental Action Plans as a suitable instrument to carry out the relevant strategy and other actions in a coherent manner including intensified compliance monitoring and enforcement especially with respect to the requirements for impact assessment under the Environmental Impact Assessment Decree of 1992.

Traditionally, environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures apply to projects likely to have significant adverse impacts on the environment. The use of EIA procedures to apply to policies, plans and programmes has recently intensified, but could be expanded by taking specifically into account the objectives of the conventions. The EIA is also a particularly powerful tool for the purpose of co-ordination, because at the initial stage of certain projects or activities, a thorough and

wide-based assessment could be made of their anticipated impacts. It can, as well, provide a forum for co-operation between institutions and sectors responsible or involved in different aspects of the relevant issues for a collective assessment and input as well as monitoring.

By Decree No. 92 of 1992, The National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) was established. Its functions include:

- ?? To provide strategic support for land development which presently constitute a major infrastructural development bottleneck hindering the development of viable economic farm holdings;
- ?? Promote and support optimum utilisation of Nigeria's rural land resources for accelerated production of food and fibre;
- ?? Institute strategic land use planning schemes to deal with major allocation problems including the creation and location of forest and grazing reserves and other areas with restricted use...

NALDA is managed by a Governing Council, consisting among others, representatives from ministries whose portfolio impinge on the environment and food security, in order to integrate multi-sectoral approaches; to strengthen the agricultural production and environmental protection programmes and encourage optimum utilisation of available land resources with minimum soil and environmental degradation, while simultaneously promoting sustainable agriculture. Section 8 of the decree enjoins the Authority to liaise with relevant research institutes, Federal and State Ministries and agencies ... for co-operation and assistance in furtherance of the Authority's functions as specified in the Decree, in such a manner as to avoid duplication of functions.

Though these laws, as well as the National Policy on the Environment, have simply stated general principles of intent without specific mechanism for co-ordination or mandatory requirements for it, there is, nevertheless, a reasonably explicit legal framework within which a co-ordinated implementation of the conventions could be facilitated. The major challenge, however, is in fashioning out the administrative mechanisms to make this happen.

## **CURRENT NATIONAL APPROACHES**

Long before the Convention to Combat Desertification came into effect, desertification had been a very serious threat to the environmental integrity of the country and to the livelihood of millions of Nigerians. However, in the late 70's to the 80's, the issue of drought and desertification was heard more through international aid agencies and NGOs efforts for funds for projects than from the government or the agencies themselves. The relevant authorities did not fully appreciate let alone co-ordinate while resources were largely wasted on duplication of efforts. The result was a fragmented assemblage of donor project activities that were executed in a largely haphazard manner or, which otherwise proved counter-productive.

The activities of the various agencies and bodies at this stage mainly focussed on establishing shelter belts, afforestation; producing seedlings and trees; establishing woodlots; water resources management; integrated rural development for poverty alleviation; and research on desertification and drought (Okpara, 1997).



Due to the existence of these programmes addressing the problem prior to the Convention, the Government initially did very little within the framework of the Convention especially with respect to specific articles for implementation. Steps towards designing a national action programme (NAP) were only initiated recently by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency involving a cross-section of interested parties (Okpara, 1997). While FEPA is empowered with the overall responsibility for environmental issues, a number of relevant activities generally fall within the mandates of other ministries. These might include, for example, forestry, agriculture, and energy. In fact, it does still appear unclear whether it is the Ministry of Agriculture or the Agency that will be directly responsible for the implementation of the Convention.

Although the problem of desertification may appear relatively localised in the national context, the effects have serious national economic and environmental implications especially the climate change agenda and sustainable development objectives of the country. Strategies aimed at combating desertification have been found useful in combating climate changes associated with the greenhouse effect. Effective co-ordination can reduce administrative and operational costs. One of the advantages of synergy could be found, for instance, in the efforts at reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, supplemented by afforestation and conservation programmes, which have multiple advantages and simultaneously fulfil the objectives of the CCD and UNFCCC. Although, there is a general recognition of the climate change-desertification nexus, much remains to be done by way of deliberate and concerted attempt at co-ordination in implementation of the governing conventions. However, adopting appropriate mechanisms for co-ordination is not easy, as the design will require much innovation by virtue of the complex nature of the problems of climate change, desertification and drought.

Nevertheless, in response to some of the challenges that have arisen, the Government has initiated a number of anti-desertification measures that seek to have a more co-ordinated and integrated approach. These initiatives are to fashion out coherent and integrated policy approaches and mechanisms to address the environmental problems including climate change and the reduction of GHG emissions; reforestation and afforestation programmes. No longer seen merely as a forestry question, desertification control is now viewed from a more global and forward-looking perspective. Some of the measures currently being undertaken include:

- ?? Institution of strategic land use planning schemes to deal with major allocation problems including the creation and location of forest and grazing reserves and other areas with restricted use, areas to be utilised for sustainable logging, woodlots, and so forth.
- ?? elaboration of national tropical forest action plan through efforts to promote agro-forestry; launching extensive reforestation and afforestation programme including community-based tree planting programme, tightening control on fuelwood extraction from reserves; and developing more efficient and alternative energy sources;
- ?? setting up drought and desertification units in the Ministries of Agriculture of all the affected states;
- ?? jointly establishing collaborative ventures to combat desertification in the Sahelian zone with the European Economic Commission and some NGOs, drawing from their experience, know-how and resources in addressing the problems;
- ?? establishing a centre for Arid Zone Studies at the University of Maiduguri under the Universities Linkage Centres Programme. The objective of this linkage is to generate credible data and train

manpower for planning purposes in environmental management of natural resources and, in particular, to develop practical measures for combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. This Centre will assist the Federal Environmental Protection Agency in training and research in the areas of:

- ? ? Vegetation and Land Use Management;
- ? ? Arid land ecology;
- ? ? Management of Range land; and
- ? ? Arid land soil water management.

In the design the NAP, the Government is utilising some existing policy documents including the National Policy on the Environment and National Environmental Awareness Master Plan. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are fully involved in the re-packaging of some of these Reports (Okpara, 1997). Greater role is being given to NGOs whose principal activities focus on the phenomenon of climate change, desertification and biodiversity loss or have developed core competencies in specific areas, especially in implementation. Such NGOs include the Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team (NEST) which has carried out extensive research and project implementation in the area of desertification and has exhibited proven capacity for developing partnership with both the government and local communities.

Clearly, co-ordinated implementation of the agreements will require horizontal structures for inter-ministry consultation and co-operation (McKenzie, 1993). The establishment of the National Committee on Climate Change and an inter-ministerial National Committee on the Desertification Convention by the government are aimed at promoting the integration of NGOs and the private sector both in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies.

There is, presently, a definite recognition that while government involvement and leadership is invariable in these issues, but it cannot provide the solution to the emergent problems alone. It has to operate side by side with other programmes and initiatives to ensure professionalism, commitment and effective action. In most cases, agencies and NGOs operating in this field adopt a community-base approach, and this is vital because the integration of policy and strategy linking the respective conventions have, as of necessity, to filter down to those communities. The community-based approach is largely informed by the necessity to obviate the bureaucracy and politics that normally bedevil much of the government-based initiatives, as well as ensure the rapid and precise convergence of action and a more efficient management of projects or programmes.

## **BARRIERS TO PROPER CO-ORDINATION**

Although the Rio agreements clearly have much in common, there is not much by of institutional framework for achieving synergies between them, both at the international and the national levels. The required mechanisms are not in place to facilitate this co-operation This is in part because of the nature of the agreements - at present, they contain little by way of specific, binding commitments, particularly for developing countries. Rather, specific national priorities and objectives in relation to the agreements are likely to arise through the relevant national planning/strategy processes, which have been taking place or are underway in most countries (McKenzie, 1993). Moreover, even

where structures are in place, differential power bases of the relevant ministries and the different priorities of the ministries involved may work against synergy.

An important source of obstacle to proper co-ordination and implementation is the existing tenural system in the country. Because land rights can, more or less, be granted at will by the Governor allocation is, quite often, made by an authority that little appreciates the wider ramifications of the use for which land is granted and without reference to other relevant agencies or tiers of government. Land allocation is often made with a view to maximisation of short or medium-term revenue or for political reasons. Sometimes too, misguided policies have led governments to grant extensive tracts of land for large scale farming, which are then subjected to clear-cutting – removing original forest cover with the attendant release of CO<sub>2</sub> and reduction of potential carbon sinks. This further exposes such land to erosion and degradation and ultimately desertification. The experience has been lack of clear understanding of the long-term implications of over-exploitation of natural resources by local communities, lack of alternatives to this pattern of life and also lack of exchange of information on similar problems in other areas. Legal reforms may begin to solve the problem of inappropriate legislation especially with respect to the land tenure system.

One of the common characteristics of the existing laws policy is the statement of general principles of the need for co-ordination and necessity to consider some of the cross-sectoral implications of specified activities. In the hands of government agencies with the principal remit to promote economic development, such general principles inevitably means that environmental objectives and co-ordination have to step behind substantive and production priorities or otherwise assigned, by all participants in the process, a mere cosmetic role.

However, it is often not the open-endedness of the provisions typically found in the laws, per se, which act to downgrade co-ordination, but rather the absence of a strong political backing and administrative focus; open-ended rules have both the potential to become an engine of vigorous enforcement responding to evolving standards or, to the contrary, a convenient excuse for inaction. Furthermore, with such bodies as NALDA with a primary mandate to improve agricultural production, there is bound to be a focus on maximum productivity, unless wider issues are taken into consideration. This is why an understanding of scientific interlinkages underpinning the subject-matter of the agreements is an important tool in addressing synergies in implementation, i.e. between climate change and desertification including biodiversity loss. Effective mechanisms to analyse cross-sectoral impacts and to feed evolving scientific knowledge into policy-making are, therefore, required (McKenzie, 1993).

One of the greatest challenges facing the management of the climate change-desertification nexus in Nigeria is the dearth of a comprehensive, adequate and reliable information to instruct the making of definite or rational decisions with respect to policy direction and implementation strategies. Although some reports estimate substantial deforestation due to human and natural factors, comprehensive data on historical trends of forest loss and the extent and rate of soil degradation and loss are scarce. There is a shortage of good estimates on the country's emissions of greenhouse gases. Uncertainties also prevail of the contribution of forests, savannahs and bush burning. The amount of available information is diffusely scattered in different institutions, most of it outdated, in various scales or are for different purposes. Most of the figures from both the United Nations institutions and independent sources are often guesstimates and products of desktop research (Eleri, 1992).

Undoubtedly, maintaining the integrity of the country's environment through co-ordinated and well-informed implementation of the relevant agreements is essential to maintaining sustainable development and improving the living standards of the rural poor in Nigeria. There is, therefore, a pressing need to undertake a more extensive environmental study of the threatened areas and to provide the required database for a more complete understanding of the environmental pressures on the country and provide policy-makers the benefit of informed choices.

Part of the problem is also traceable to the fact that there are currently no defined modalities for co-ordination among the governing conventions which will provide guidelines and framework for similar co-ordination at the implementation stages at the national and sub-regional levels. There is therefore the need for these institutions, as much as possible, to harmonise their approaches and requirements to make it easier for member states to simultaneously meet their respective goals in as many aspects as possible.

In summation, very little of these have been done in practice because of several obstacles and barriers that exist at all levels and inhibit co-ordination and include:

- ?? absence of coherent provisions for co-ordination the conventions and the UN system;
- ?? competition for power and resources ("turf mentality") . Because, to the extent that they relate to the same resources, there may also be tensions or even conflicts between the agreements and implementing agencies. This is even more likely to be more marked at the National and local levels. (Mackenzie, 1993).
- ?? conflicting agendas and lack of prioritisation. Usually, implementing bodies, based on their mandates and structure will often have pre-set agenda and fashion out their priorities based on that.
- ?? conflicts between national priorities and global agendas. For instance, the national economy of Nigeria is almost solely dependent on fossil fuel production. Yet, all the major global programmes to cut greenhouse gases emission entail substantial reduction in the consumption of fossil fuels which will, invariably, negatively affect her national income. In the face of serious economic crisis, production maximisation by the country will, and has in fact taken precedence.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

Some of the early lessons deducible from the current, even if minimal, effort at co-ordination show that:

- i. The problem of excessive soil erosion and land degradation has its roots more in socio- economic conditions than adverse physical conditions. To succeed in combating desertification, measures taken should necessarily address physical, economic and socio-economic factors simultaneously involving the joint efforts of related sectors while keeping the respective and common object of the different agreements in view;

- ii. NGOs, Local communities and the Private Sector must be increasingly involved when implementing improved land management activities while the concept of popular participation should be further developed to create models for a long term commitment by land users and communities in resource management;
- iii. In order to carry out effective long term programmes and husbandry activities, closer links with and among relevant institutions and measures to strengthen them are needed throughout the country. This realisation came out strongly during the Sub-regional awareness workshop on the Convention to Combat Desertification held at the Afforestation Projects Co-ordinating Unit, Kano in northern Nigeria.

## **SOME SUGGESTIONS**

It is recognised that the provisions of the respective conventions have a high potential for complementarity in their substantive aspects share common concerns and have interconnected facets. New approaches to be adopted should, therefore, seek to identify articles and principles that are overlapping, complimentary and/or actually or potentially mutually reinforcing. The goal is to identify potentials for synergy and increased efficiency in the implementation of these agreements.

That co-ordination is needed in the implementation of the various international agreements is beyond dispute and definitely necessary. Therefore, in order to overcome some of the problems it is essential that new strategies be fostered based on a global approach to both desertification control and climate change mitigation. Parties must conduct and strengthen programs which focus on research into drought resistance and ways of improving the scientific capabilities of the relevant institutions, concentrating on studies and research projects aiming to improve understanding of interactions between resources, population and the environment.

There must also be a redefinition of the roles of national institutions and agencies and strengthening of national planning, steering and co-ordination capacities at all levels. This can be facilitated by establishing a mechanism for co-ordination linked to national committees for co-ordinating implementation of the various agreements. Legal provisions should be made in there governing legislation requiring co-ordination and co-operation and providing the mechanism for such co-ordination by, for instance, specifying a focal point or co-ordinating agency.

With regard to foreign aid, care need to be taken in applying it such that it can be designed to get around the government or donor-driven agenda that often fail to respond to community needs or to take into consideration local institutional capacity either to absorb aid or sustain it. There is a greater need for the consolidation and co-ordination of external aid, which are currently being applied selectively and independently of existing programmes. Multilateral and bilateral donors are well placed to ensure that their activities contribute to the exploitation of synergies between the agreements. Mechanisms are required to ensure that donors' activities are complementary. At national level, a co-ordination mechanism may be helpful to consider programmatic linkages in accordance with nationally set priorities. The recipient government be primarily responsible for ensuring that the activities of donors conform to national plans and priorities.

As suggested by McKenzie, some general points can be made about possible institutional mechanisms for co-ordinating an approach to the implementation of the agreements. First, to effectively enhance implementation of the agreements, co-ordination needs to take place at all levels:

- ?? international;
- ?? regional (and subregional);
- ?? national; and
- ?? local.

It should also take place in relation to:

- ?? policy-making
- ?? programmes and planning
- ?? projects/management.

In other words, co-ordinated planning should be followed up by operational co-ordination by the full involvement of non-governmental organisations as well as the traditional institutions of the participating population which are involved in desertification control and climate change mitigation, as well as biodiversity conservation (McKenzie, 1993).

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a great deal that is reinforcing among the agreements in their substantive requirements and goals. Efforts toward accomplishing the various goals can be mutually consistent. Much could be gained by emphasising implementation activities that are mutually reinforcing. This is particularly so with respect to activities that build national capacity and resolve (McKenzie, 1993). Some attention should be given to the subject of eliminating redundancy and overlap, especially in reporting and related obligations, and thereby capturing some efficiencies.

Co-ordination among and in the implementation of the agreements can only be successful if policies are revised and long-term strategies are adopted with strong political support and adequate financial resources. Co-ordination has tremendous advantages and is mostly desirable, but care need to be taken in order not to create cumbersome administrative structures and bureaucracy that will only serve to impede progress or create new problems.

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