

PROGRAMME OF CATALYTIC SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN WEST ASIA AND NORTH AFRICA – PHASE V

**FINAL REPORT
JULY 2017**



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The “Programme of Catalytic Support to Implement the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in West Asia and North Africa – Phase V” ended in June 2017. It was implemented by the UNDP Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification within the framework of the Integrated Drylands Development Programme, a global UNDP initiative to advance UNCCD implementation and sustainable development in drylands. The Programme was financed by the Government of Finland, with significant contributions from partner countries.

The overall objective of the Programme was to support the implementation of the UNCCD in West Asia and North Africa, specifically its 10-Year Strategic Plan (2008-2018) with focus on improving the living conditions of affected populations, improving the conditions of affected ecosystems, and mobilizing partners and resources for drylands development.

The purpose of the Programme was to mobilize partners and resources to improve the living conditions of local populations and the management of natural resources in areas affected by desertification and drought in six Programme countries, namely Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. This was achieved through the provision of policy advice, technical support and catalytic funding towards: a) Mainstreaming dryland development issues into policy and planning frameworks; b) Enhancing the livelihoods and building the resilience of dryland communities; c) Improving the management of land and water resources; d) Promoting gender equality and empowering dryland women; and e) Facilitating knowledge sharing and experience exchange.

The Programme adopted a participatory management modality embodied in its Advisory Committee. This Committee consisted of: a) Representatives from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and UNDP – these constituted the Core Management Group providing strategic guidance and approving Programme reports and accounts; and b) Representatives from national institutions in partner countries contributing to the implementation of Programme activities. The Committee met annually to review progress and agree on the way forward. The meeting provided an opportunity for partner countries to network and share



experience on drylands development. The final evaluation of the Programme, commissioned by the Government of Finland and UNDP, concluded that “it was efficient and effective in promoting inclusive and resilient drylands development and presented a good model for replication by similar development programmes”. The evaluation highlighted the efficiency of the Programme and its ability to make effective catalytic use of official development assistance to mobilize financial resources – public and private, national and international – to drive the transformation towards sustainability in the drylands. The evaluation estimated the number of direct beneficiaries at 30,000 people and concluded that national efforts will continue following the closure of the Programme. It commended the significant contribution of the Programme to the advancement of gender equality and women empowerment in partner countries and within UNCCD processes.

This final report presents the main achievements of the Programme and reflects on the good practices and lessons learnt from its implementation. The achievements are analyzed with respect to their contribution to the following drylands development priorities:

1. Advancing the UNCCD/Drylands agenda;
2. Mobilizing partners and resources for drylands development;
3. Improving the livelihoods of the drylands poor;
4. Improving land and water management in drylands;
5. Empowering dryland women; and
6. Knowledge sharing and experience exchange.





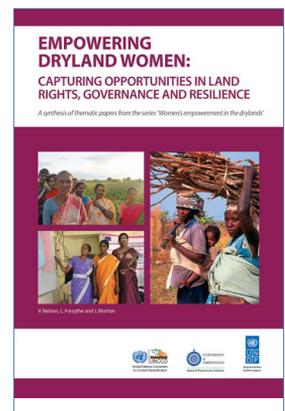
Dryland peoples and areas face significant challenges from environmental degradation, demographic and socioeconomic trends, and the added threat of climate change. The marginalization of dryland zones resulted from persistent misconceptions and a history of highly inappropriate policies, creating under-investment, poverty, social exclusion and environmental degradation. Mobilizing international attention, partners and resources for drylands development is therefore of paramount importance. In this context, the Programme supported the policy advocacy efforts of the UNCCD - the global forum for drylands development – namely the following priority initiatives:

EMPOWERMENT OF DRYLAND WOMEN

Women play an important role in drylands development, managing land, crops, forestry and water resources. However, women not only experience the marginalization of the dryland zone where they live, but they also face specific forms of discrimination related to gender and other kinds of social difference. The promotion of gender equality is an essential development goal and vital to achieving sustainable and inclusive drylands development. The contributions of the Programme to this endeavor are highlighted below.



- The Programme partnered with the UNCCD to organize the first ever “Gender and Drylands Policy Forum” at UNCCD/COP 11 (Namibia, September 2013). The event led to the inclusion of “Women Empowerment” as a one of the 6 priority action areas of the “Namib Declaration” issued by the Convention and to the launch of the Windhoek Initiative on the “Empowerment of Drylands Women.”
- The Programme supported the organization of the second “Gender policy Forum” during UNCCD/COP12 (Turkey, October 2015); its outcomes were reflected in the Ankara Ministerial Declaration in which ministers committed to “dedicate ourselves to promoting gender equality and the role of women as actors of change in addressing Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought.”
- The Programme prepared a series of thematic papers on the “Empowerment of Drylands Women” to inform the policy dialogue within the framework of the UNCCD; these included: “Gender and Drylands Governance: Empowering women for change”, “Strengthening Drylands Women’s Land Rights: Local contexts, Global change” and “Achieving Dryland Women’s Empowerment: Environmental Resilience and Social Transformation Imperatives”. The three publications proposed strategic actions in the policy, institutional and capacity spheres to reduce inequalities and promote the empowerment of drylands women. They were widely disseminated by the UNCCD including at the: i) Climate Summit in Paris in December 2015; ii) Launch of the SDG Action Campaign in Bonn in May 2016; and iii) Expert meeting on Land Degradation Neutrality in Washington in February 2016.

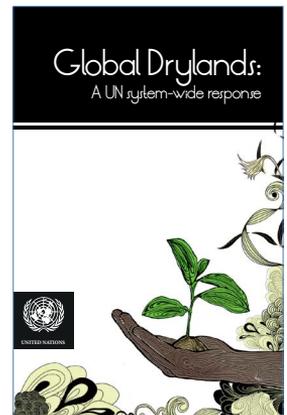


The Government of Finland played a critical role in the above efforts including: a) Co-Chairing the first and second Gender Policy Forums by the Ambassadors of Finland to Namibia and Turkey respectively; b) Keynote address to the second Forum in Ankara by Ms. Tarja Halonen, Former President of Finland and Drylands Ambassador of the Convention; and c) Provision of technical assistance and funding through the Programme.

COORDINATED ACTION IN DRYLANDS

Drylands cover 41% of the earth terrestrial surface, they are home to a third of humanity and have some of the highest levels of poverty, yet in most countries they have long been neglected by investment and sustainable development interventions. There is need to encourage appropriate investment and action in the drylands building on the resources and capacities of dryland people and on new and emergent economic opportunities.

The report “Global Drylands: A UN System-wide Response,” was prepared by 18 UN agencies following calls by governments for a UN system-wide response to dryland challenges. The report’s key messages are that drylands offer opportunities for local populations and provide regional and global benefits, and that the UN is uniquely positioned to promote investments in drylands. Countries called upon the UNCCD to develop a concrete action plan for the way forward. Following a request from the Convention, the Programme provided technical and financial support for the elaboration of the “Action Plan for Coordinated Action in the Drylands” which was presented at a side-event in Windhoek on 19 September 2013, and endorsed by the Conference of the Parties (COP), inviting countries to support its implementation.



GLOBAL LAND OUTLOOK

The Programme supported the development of the Global Land Outlook (GLO), an ambitious policy initiative led by the UNCCD Secretariat to determine the future course of land policies and land management across the globe. The GLO is expected to become the new flagship publication of the UNCCD, akin to the CBD’s Global Biodiversity Outlook and UNEP’s Global Environment Outlook.

The first edition of the GLO will highlight the central importance of land quality to human well-being, assess current trends in land conversion, degradation and loss, identify the driving factors and analyze the impacts, provide scenarios for future challenges and opportunities, and present a new and transformative vision for land management policy, planning and practice at global and national scales. The conclusions and recommendations of the GLO will serve to facilitate the high-level policy dialogue during UNCCD/COP13 in China in September 2017.

The Programme provided substantive input for the compilation of 2 working papers used to elaborate the GLO report, namely: “Modalities for Scaling-up Sustainable Land Management and Restoration of Degraded Land”; and “Towards Gender-Sensitive Land Degradation Neutrality”. It prepared a good practice case study on ‘Programme Oasis Sud’ in Morocco for the “Scaling-up” paper and GLO report. The study argues that the success of this programme resides in: 1) The effective integration of “oases” priorities in national, regional and local

development plans; 2) The strong ownership reflected by significant funding (about 85%) from national budgets; and 3) The tangible results achieved on the ground in terms of improving livelihood and ecosystem conditions on a large scale. This case study, "Living Oasis – The Fight against Desertification in Morocco" was published in the prestigious publication "Land for Life – Create Wealth, Transform Lives" (World Bank and UNCCD, 2016, pp. 68-82).



LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY

Land degradation is a barrier to sustainable development that destabilizes communities, particularly in dryland agro-ecosystems. About one billion people in developing countries live in extreme poverty. Two-thirds of them live in rural areas and depend on land for food, water, fuel and shelter. Relying on nature for their livelihoods and subsistence, the poor stand to suffer disproportionately from land degradation in the coming decades.

In this context, a concerted global effort is needed to halt and reverse land degradation. This has been acknowledged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the adoption of SDG Target 15.3 on “combating desertification, restoring degraded land and striving to achieve a land degradation-neutral world.”

In partnership with the UNCCD, the Programme supported the preparedness of its partner countries to achieve SDG Target 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), the new guiding principle for the implementation of the Convention. It provided technical assistance for the organization of regional capacity building workshops on LDN target setting for Africa and Asia, organized in May and July 2016 respectively. The objectives of these workshops were to: 1) Introduce the LDN conceptual framework; 2) Launch the LDN target setting process in participating countries; and 3) Facilitate the elaboration of country work plans to develop voluntary LDN targets. Five Programme countries participated in these workshops including Morocco and Algeria in Africa and Lebanon, Syria and Jordan in Asia. Moreover, the Programme supported Lebanon to develop voluntary LDN targets for COP13 (China, September 2017).



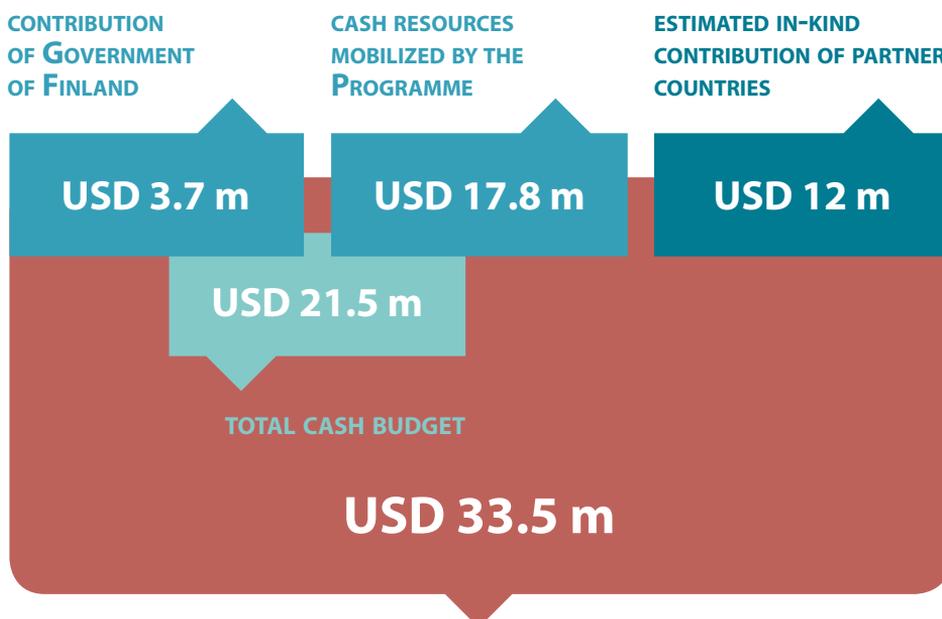
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MOBILIZING PARTNERS AND RESOURCES FOR DRYLANDS DEVELOPMENT

The final evaluation concluded that the Programme was effective in mobilizing partners and resources to improve the living conditions of local populations and the management of natural resources in the six partner countries. The evaluation stated that “The Programme has managed to mobilize a remarkable amount of funding. It has invested approximately USD1.65 million for individual projects (both for planning and implementation), while the total amount of resources mobilized was USD13.8 million in cash, in addition to significant in-kind contributions from partner countries”. These funds were mobilized from the governments of partner countries and a variety of donors including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the European Union (EU), the Government of Japan and the Coca-Cola Foundation. An additional contribution of USD4.0 million was confirmed in Tunisia after the completion of the evaluation, thus bringing the total amount of cash mobilized by the Programme to approximately USD17.8 million. These funds complemented the USD3.7 million contribution of the Government of Finland to the Programme, resulting in a total of USD21.5 million in cash financing.

Moreover, the Programme Team estimated the in-kind contributions made by national partners (staff time, labor, vehicles, rent, etc.) around USD12 million, bringing the overall value of the activities implemented by the Programme in the six partner countries to USD 33.5 million in 2013-2017.

The success of the Programme in mobilizing partners and resources resided primarily in its effective support for mainstreaming drylands development issues, its flexibility in responding to emerging national priorities, and its catalytic approach allowing it to “make things happen”.



**OVERALL VALUE OF ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE PROGRAMME
IN THE SIX PARTNER COUNTRIES
(2013-2017)**

MAINSTREAMING DRYLANDS DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

The Programme supported the integration of dryland development priorities into national planning and budgeting frameworks, including UNDP Country Programmes. This was crucial for bringing attention, building strong ownership and securing financial resources from national budgets for addressing these priorities through the interventions supported by the Programme, namely:

- Programme Oasis Sud, Morocco - A transformative initiative designed to improve the living and ecosystem conditions in the southern oases of the Kingdom;
- El-Brek-Kasserine Project, Tunisia – Providing much-needed assistance to enhance livelihoods and management of land/water resources in marginalized communities;
- PRCHAT Project, Algeria - A capacity building initiative to support the effective implementation of the ambitious Rural Renewal Programme;
- Integration of Sustainability Considerations in the Tourism Sector, Jordan – To mitigate the negative impacts of tourism on the fragile ecosystems of the country; and
- Governance of Drinking Water in Rural Areas, Tunisia – To build decentralized capacities and improve infrastructure to ensure access to safe drinking water for the rural poor.



These interventions targeted marginalized areas and poor communities, i.e. poverty pockets in partner countries, all of them middle-income countries. The Programme promoted an inclusive approach to development at the local level, advocated for integrating these areas in the national development agenda and supported the mobilization of financial resources for their development. Thus, it helped address inequalities in access to development, a major problem in the Arab Region.

RESPONDING TO EMERGING NATIONAL PRIORITIES

The Programme adopted a flexible approach allowing it to respond to the emerging national priorities related to the repercussions of the Syria crisis in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. It provided technical assistance for the implementation of the response plans in these countries, helping in the mobilization of partners and resources for the following interventions:

- Host Communities Support Programme, Lebanon - Building the production and marketing capacities of women agri-food cooperatives in communities hosting Syrian refugees;
- Mitigating the Impacts of Syrian Refugees on Ecosystem Services and Land Degradation, Jordan – Technical support provided for the development of this project; and
- Assistance for the Restoration and Stabilization of the Livelihoods of People Affected by the Crisis, Syria. Interventions to restore agricultural productivity and enhancing food security of vulnerable groups, particularly women headed households.

CATALYTIC APPROACH

The Programme acted as a catalyst for promising initiatives in partner countries. It provided technical advice for the development of these initiatives, convened partners and invested seed funding for their development and implementation. This approach paved the way to major multi-donor initiatives benefiting many beneficiaries (about 30,000 direct beneficiaries as per the final evaluation). As such, the Programme made efficient catalytic use of the official development assistance provided by the Government of Finland to mobilize significant additional financial resources – public and private, domestic and international – to drive the transformation towards sustainability in the drylands.



The livelihoods of dryland communities are often frail. They rely on a fragile natural resource base in terms of soil quality and water availability. They are frequently threatened by drought, whose effects are exacerbated by climate change. The human capital in terms of education and training is limited, thus restricting the opportunities for livelihood enhancement.

Poor market access for goods and services produced by drylands communities represents a major constraint to sustainable livelihoods. The underlying causes are weak production and processing capacities, inadequate supply chains, small private sector involvement and unaccommodating policies even when high value goods and services can be produced.

Local institutions are often absent or of weak capacity which limits access to decision-making processes. The needs of dryland communities are frequently ignored in national development frameworks which reduces the resources, technical and financial, made available to them.

In this context, the Programme supported initiatives designed to improve the livelihoods of dryland communities and build their resilience to socioeconomic and climatic stresses. These initiatives targeted poor communities in marginalized areas affected by poverty, desertification and drought. The Programme adopted a livelihood approach to drylands development, prioritizing the needs of poor men and women, supporting their livelihood strategies, building their productive capacities and facilitating the access of their products and services to markets.

The initiatives supported by the Programme and their main achievements are highlighted below.

PROGRAMME OASIS SUD (POS), MOROCCO

POS is an ambitious initiative designed to promote local development planning, livelihoods enhancement, sustainable natural resource management and women empowerment in the oases of southern Morocco. The elaboration of Community Development Plans is probably the most important contribution of POS to the improvement of the livelihoods of the inhabitants of these oases. A participatory bottom-up approach was used to develop these plans, ensuring that the pressing needs of the beneficiaries were integrated in the planning process. Significant funding was secured from national budgets for their implementation. The plans became credible tools for mobilizing resources from bilateral donors, UN Agencies and the private sector.



THE OASIS OF ASRIR

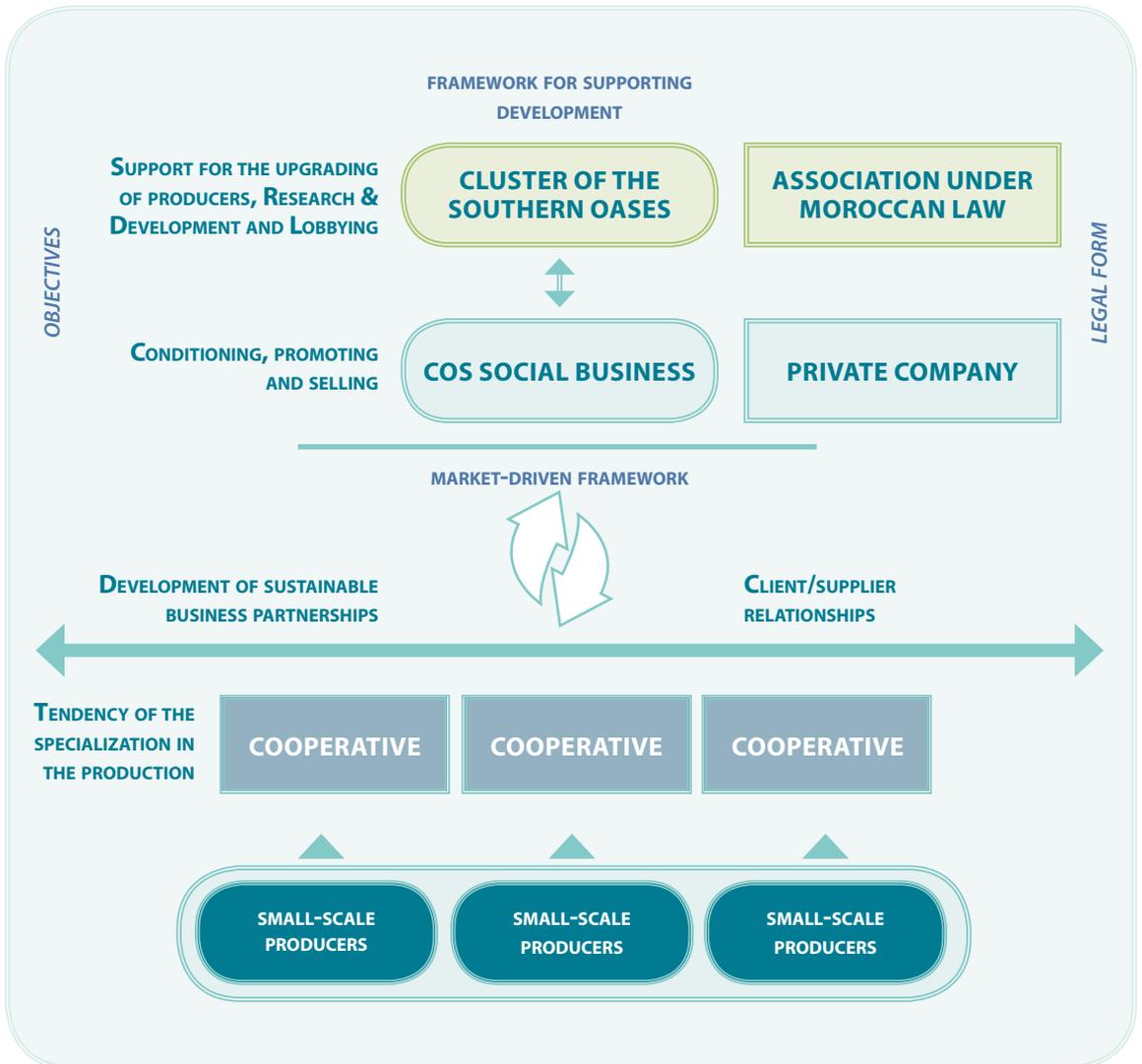
The Programme supported the implementation of the Community Development Plan of the oasis Asrir (Province of Guelmim). In total, 655 families (3715 people, 1954 women and 1761 men) benefited from: 1) Livelihoods diversification including in the tourism and agri-food sectors; 2) Improved access to drinking and irrigation water; 3) Sand dune fixation and planting of cactus and palm trees; 4) Supply chain development for local products, promotion of ecotourism and income generating activities; and 5) Establishment of 3 focal houses to support women socio-economic development



CLUSTER DES OASIS DU SAHARA

Cluster des Oasis du Sahara (COS) was established as a viable public-private partnership to support the production, conditioning and marketing of products from nearly 70 rural associations and cooperatives. The products are marketed under patented labels: “Nadweyya” and “Alaya” (meaning invitation and woman respectively in Hassaniya language). Two shops were opened, “Nadweyya Guelmim” and “Nadweyya Rabat”, by COS Social Business – a private sector company – to market the goods produced by the cooperatives/associations, grouped under a non-profit organization - Cluster des Oasis du Sahara - for capacity building, networking and advocacy purposes. The business model is illustrated below.

BUSINESS MODEL OF CLUSTER DES OASIS DU SAHARA



The sustainability of these achievements was ensured by: 1) Strong national ownership of the interventions, funded primarily from national resources; 2) Enhanced capacity of local stakeholders in project design and implementation; 3) Documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learnt to support scaling-up and replication efforts; 4) Creation of self-sustaining structures (Cluster des Oasis du Sahara, COS Social Business); and 5) Establishment and strengthening of the Network of Local Elected Women to better engage in local governance and development processes.

EL-BREK/KASSERINE INITIATIVE, TUNISIA

El-Brek is a poor area in the Governorate of Kasserine that is affected by desertification and drought. The socioeconomic situation in El-Brek is challenging given the fragile ecosystem baseline, years of marginalization by the national authorities and limited support by development partners. The intervention was designed to: a) Support to the implementation of priority actions to improve local livelihoods and natural resources management; and b) Build the capacity of beneficiaries and mobilize resources for their implementation.



- **Empowerment**

A development group was established to bring together the local community. Awareness raising and capacity building activities were implemented to enhance the role of this group in driving the local development process.

- **Access to Water**

Access to water was facilitated through the construction of 5 underground water reservoirs (fesguias) - totaling a capacity of 500^m³ and serving the needs of about 50 families – and the provision of animal-driven cisterns to transport water. A feasibility study was undertaken and allowed the identification of 7 potential water sources in the area. Based on this study and following sustained advocacy efforts, a drinking water system – operated with solar pumps - was built to meet the needs of the local population.

- **Better Land Management**

Sustainable land management activities were implemented on 67 hectares, including the construction of 7,000 m of terraces and the planting of 10,000 olive trees by the beneficiaries.

- **Access to Finance**

A rotational micro-credit fund was established with a capital of USD100,000 to provide much needed financial resources to encourage individual initiative and support livelihood enhancement. The main activities supported by the fund included fruit tree and vegetable production, animal fattening and traditional handicrafts.

- **Livelihood Enhancement**

The initiative enhanced local livelihoods by making water available for household use and irrigation, improving crop and animal production, and facilitating access to micro-credit. The rotational nature of the fund was successful with nearly 100%



reimbursement rate and the possibility to reach an increasing number of families and women. To date, about 150 persons (mainly women) benefited from the fund. The average loan for animal fattening was \$1,000 for a 6-month period with an average return of \$200.

- **Gender Impacts**

The initiative had positive impacts on women. Access to water was facilitated, reducing the effort invested by women to collect water to their families. Energy efficient cooking stoves were provided, reducing the amount of time invested by women to gather wood. Additionally, women were the main beneficiaries of the micro-credit fund which contributed to their economic empowerment.

- **Sustainability and Replicability**

The initiative was demand-driven and the activities were agreed by the local development group, building on existing capacities and cultural realities. The rotational nature of the micro-credit fund further enhanced sustainability.

Good practices in local development planning, water harvesting, energy efficiency and micro-finance were documented to support replication efforts within the framework of the 11th National Socio-economic Plan.

The success of the El-Brek initiative can be attributed to the following factors:

- Effective advocacy to mobilize national attention and resources;
- Pooling of resources, national and development assistance, for efficiency and synergy;
- Community mobilization into a structured group to strengthen its role in decision-making;
- Collaborative partnership between the Government, an NGO and the local community;
- Flexible approach to accommodate adjustments based on feedback from the community;
- Implementation of interventions based on local perceptions and indigenous knowledge.

RURAL RENEWAL PROGRAMME (RRP), ALGERIA

The RRP is a large-scale initiative launched by the Government of Algeria to revitalize the country's rural areas, which are home to more than 13 million Algerians, making up about 35% of the population. Its objectives are to: i) Improve the living conditions of the rural poor; ii) Enhance employment and diversification of economic activity; iii) Strengthen social and territorial cohesion; and iv) Protect the environment and rural ecosystems. Although the RRP focuses on agriculture, it includes projects relating to tourism, culture, education, industry and environment with the intention of fueling sustainable growth in rural areas.

A technical assistance project (PRCHAT) was initiated by the Government and UNDP to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture and



Rural Development (MARD) to implementation of the RRP. Under this project, the Programme supported the establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system at the national, regional and local levels as follows:

- i. A series of national and regional capacity building workshops on institutionalizing M&E processes in MARD programs/projects was organized;
- ii. An M&E Unit was established at the Ministry and an M&E Manual was developed. The capacity of this Unit was strengthened with the integration of 68 technical and managerial staff members and the allocation of an operating budget;
- iii. About half of the M&E Unit staff were based at the regional and local levels to improve the implementation of intended RRP interventions;
- iv. An intranet portal was developed, a network of “Communications Focal Points” was established, brochures were prepared and a magazine was published to enhance the communication and outreach efforts of the Ministry regarding the RRP; and
- v. An evaluation was conducted to review the performance of RRP projects implemented in 8 governorates. The evaluation provided a better understanding of the results achieved, particularly in terms of improving the livelihoods of beneficiaries. It shed the light on the relevance of the interventions, the use of public funds and the efficiency of implementation arrangements.



The impact and sustainability of Programme support was reflected in the institutionalization of the M&E system by the Ministry as well as in its integration in the 5-year Development Plan (2015-2019) for the sector. This system will facilitate an effective and transparent implementation of rural development interventions to the benefit of the rural poor.

RESTORATION AND STABILIZATION OF LIVELIHOODS, SYRIA

The situation in Syria evolved into the biggest humanitarian and development crisis in recent history, with implications for global peace and security. In response, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) was launched in December 2014 as a consolidated regional framework aimed at addressing refugee protection needs, the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable, and the socio-economic impacts of the Syria crisis on neighboring countries.

Within the framework of the 3RP, the Programme supported the implementation of the UN-led initiative “Assistance for the Restoration and Stabilization of Livelihoods of People Affected by the Crisis in Syria”, targeting the Governorate of Al-Hassakeh and focusing on the agricultural sector as the main driver of the governorate’s economy and the main job provider. The support aimed at restoring livelihoods, enhancing food security and creating job opportunities for men and women through the following initiatives:

DAR AL-SALAM FOOD PROCESSING INITIATIVE

In partnership with the Armenian Catholic Church, the Programme supported the establishment of a dairy farm and production unit. An area of 84,000^m² was provided by the Church in Abu Rasein, Al-Hassakeh, to host about 50 cows and a fully equipped dairy production facility. A water well was drilled and irrigation canals were built. A sales point was established and equipped with refrigeration and other equipment. The project created employment for 31 beneficiary households, 23 of whom were female-headed; direct beneficiaries totaled 155 persons. Additionally, about 500 families (about 3,500 people) residing in the area benefited from increased availability of dairy products on the local market at affordable prices.



BADIRA INITIATIVE FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF SMALL FARMERS

The objective of this initiative was to make fresh vegetables available on the local market at affordable prices. About 750 small farmers affected by the conflict were provided with inputs including seeds, fertilizer, pesticide and farming tools to produce vegetables and keep them in business. A total of 1,250 hectares were put into production, about 4,000 seasonal work-days were secured, mostly for women, and 45 job opportunities were maintained/created in the private sector through business continuity.

These initiatives helped build the resilience of vulnerable groups to the shocks and stresses resulting from the conflict. By supporting affected groups, particularly women headed households, to restore agricultural productivity and enhance food security, the Programme provided much needed assistance for mitigating the effects of the conflict.



HOST COMMUNITIES SUPPORT PROGRAMME, LEBANON

In Lebanon, the Programme supported the national response plan to the Syria crisis, specifically the implementation of the Host Communities Support Programme. The support aimed at strengthening the production and marketing capacities of women agri-food cooperatives in communities hosting Syrian refugees. The intervention logic was to contribute to increased capacities of these communities to protect development gains and achieve improved wellbeing outcomes in the face of shocks and stresses resulting from the crisis. Grant agreements were signed with the Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture in Zahle (Bekaa Valley) and Saida (South Lebanon) to channel this support. In the Bekaa, 12 cooperatives were supported through various activities including training on production and marketing aspects, business proposal development and participation in the 5th Beirut Cooking Festival (the most important food and beverage exhibition in Lebanon). The 12 cooperatives submitted business proposals and 4 of them were selected for funding based on criteria set by the Chambers of Commerce and the Programme.

In the South, 11 cooperatives participated in capacity building activities and in the 4-day exhibition organized by the Chamber of Commerce for the agri-food sector, which offered a great opportunity for marketing and networking. These cooperatives were supported in the formulation of business proposals and 6 of them were selected to receive grants for the purchase of equipment to produce and process agri-food products with good market value including zaatar, freekeh (grilled green wheat), free-range chicken, etc.

Moreover, the Programme assisted the Social Development Centers of the Ministry of Social Affairs in elaborating vocational training programs for women and youth. A market-based assessment was conducted to identify the professions and skills needed in 4 communities hosting Syrian refugees. Training programs were then designed and employment opportunities were explored with the private sector, leading to the creation of vocational jobs for women and youth in host communities.

By supporting communities hosting Syrian refugees in Lebanon to invest in improving livelihoods opportunities, the Programme helped strengthen their resilience in terms of absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities.



The Programme countries belong to the world's most water-scarce areas and are subject to serious land degradation. Limited water availability constrains development and is a source of potential conflicts. The effects of climate change are already being felt in terms of more frequent and prolonged drought episodes exacerbating desertification and poverty.

Strengthening the capacities of local stakeholders to manage land and water resources is essential for addressing the challenges facing sustainable development in drylands. Limited civil society capacity, or in certain cases, the troubled state of public security in Programme countries, has been a drawback to ensuring local people's participation in the management of land and water resources. Greater awareness raising, capacity building and empowerment are therefore necessary, to strengthen governance systems and improve the management of these resources. The interventions supported by the Programme aimed at promoting sustainable land management and effective water governance, particularly at the local level, with the objective of improving the ecosystems and livelihoods of intended beneficiaries.

“SUSTAINABLE TOURISM” PROJECT, JORDAN

The Programme supported the development of a large-scale project to reduce the impact of tourism on the fragile ecosystems of the country. The project, “Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation in Tourism Sector Development in Jordan” (“Sustainable Tourism” Project), was funded by the GEF with significant contributions from national budgets. The project intervened at three levels: a) At the national level to develop a regulatory framework to reduce the impact of tourism on biodiversity and land degradation; b) At the regional/landscape level to raise public awareness and build the capacity for monitoring and enforcement; and c) At the local level to enhance enforcement capacity and management effectiveness of protected areas (Petra, Wadi Rum and Dibbin).

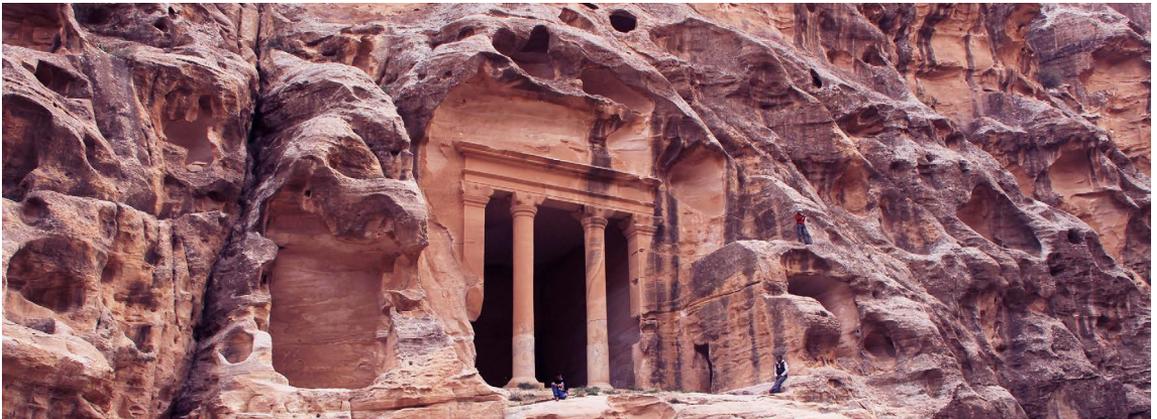


Following the approval and launch of the project, the Programme provided technical assistance, in partnership with UN Habitat, for the elaboration of sustainable land use and management plans. This included advisory services for the development of the land use plans while building the institutional and enforcement capacity of relevant agencies. A comprehensive technical report on the legal and institutional framework related to land use planning within the project sites (Petra, Wadi Rum and Dibbin) was prepared. It included a gap analysis based on broad consultations with stakeholders and an action plan for implementation. An agreement was also signed with the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature (RSCN) to develop a Biodiversity Information Management System to provide the basic ecological and socio-economic baselines

for land use planning and the foundation for the monitoring system. The results achieved in the 3 sites can be summarized as follows:

PETRA

- Nomination of Petra as a new protected area under the National Protected Areas Network;
- Development of an integrated land use plan consolidating the 6 land use plans already available for the site, including the elaboration of Biodiversity-Sensitive Land Use Planning Guidelines;
- Elaboration of a site management plan, lobbying for the integration of ecological concerns; and
- A capacity assessment of the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority (PDTRA) was conducted regarding land use planning and a capacity building program was developed accordingly.



DIBBEN

- Adjustment of the official buffer zone of the Dibbin Forest Reserve to better protect the site which houses one of the oldest, largest and naturally grown habitats of Aleppo Pines in Jordan;
- Designation of a dedicated picnic area to alleviate the pressure on the main forest; mobilization of \$1 million from the Royal Court to establish this area;
- Preparation of a land use plan including the proposed adjustment to the official buffer zone; the identification of sensitive areas and their level of protection; and the development of a GIS database for the site; and
- Elaboration of a 5-year sustainable land management plan for the site, including interventions to reduce land degradation and protect biodiversity.

WADI RUM

- Preparation of Land Use Planning Guidelines to guide development in the buffer zone of the Rum Protected Area; and
- Elaboration of a land use plan to facilitate the sustainability of the natural and cultural assets of the protected area.

GOVERNANCE OF DRINKING WATER IN RURAL AREAS, TUNISIA

The Programme played a catalytic role in the design of this project, the mobilization of partners and resources for its implementation, and the delivery of intended activities in the rural Governorates of Kasserine, Beja, Bizerte and Zaghouan. The objectives of the project were to:

1. Enhance access to drinking water through the rehabilitation and upgrading of drinking water networks;
2. Support participation and partnership in decision making processes at regional and local levels for a better governance of drinking water; and
3. Enhance the participation of beneficiaries (including women and youth), civil society and private sector actors in the planning, implementation and management of initiatives to improve access to drinking water.



The main results achieved by the project, reflecting the cumulative contributions of all the partners (Government of Tunisia, Programme, Government of Japan and Coca-Cola Foundation) are highlighted below:

- About 3,550 families, or 18,500 people (over half are women), have improved access to safe drinking water;
- The management and technical capacities of 14 water users' groups were strengthened through tailored training that is adapted to the local context;
- The overall performance of these groups was improved significantly, as reflected in functioning boards including women, efficient operations, sound financial and technical management;
- A gender assessment was conducted and action plans were developed for the 14 users' groups to support the participation of women in the management of drinking water; and
- A total of 14 drinking water networks were rehabilitated and upgraded to provide safe drinking water to the local communities.

The Programme helped the Government of Tunisia in preparing a comprehensive publication to document the lessons learnt and good practices in support of national scaling-up efforts. Moreover, 2-D videos were prepared in Arabic on the establishment and management of water users' groups, to facilitate replication in other rural areas.



PROGRAMME OASIS SUD (POS), MOROCCO

A series of oases lines up the South of Morocco in the provinces of Guelmim, Assa-Zag and Tata. At the door of the desert, these ecosystems have vital ecological, economic and social importance and act as natural barrier against the advancing desert. The cumulative effects of climate change and recurrent droughts, aggravated by socio-economic changes make these oases today the theater of various processes of land degradation leading to loss, abandonment and migration. About 430,000 people are affected by these processes.

The Programme supported the implementation of POS, an ambitious initiative designed to enhance local development planning, livelihoods diversification, management of natural resources and women empowerment in the oases of southern Morocco. This included the implementation of priority land and water management interventions identified in Community Development Plans. The elaboration of these plans was based on a participatory territorial diagnosis to best capture local needs and opportunities. The plans were approved by local authorities and funding was secured from national budgets for their implementation.

This intervention led to significant results in terms of scaling-up sustainable land and water management practices in the oases as highlighted below:

- Promotion of sustainable land management practices to enhance agricultural productivity in 20 oases;
- Improved management and restoration of about 10,000 ha of degraded ancestral cacti plantations;
- Implementation of erosion control measures and sand dune fixation in 20 oases;

- Promotion of sustainable water management including reviving traditional knowledge and customary practices of water allocation in 15 oases; and
- Rehabilitation of khettaras – i.e. traditional systems that channel water to palm groves – in 15 oases.



The sustainability of these achievements was facilitated by: 1) Strong national ownership of the interventions, funded primarily from national resources; 2) Enhanced capacity of local stakeholders in sustainable land and water management; and 3) Documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learnt to support scaling-up and replication efforts.

ADDRESSING MULTIPLE THREATS TO ECOSYSTEMS AND LIVELIHOODS IN WEST-CENTRAL TUNISIA

The Programme supported the Government of Tunisia to develop a large-scale GEF project to halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss in West-Central Tunisia (Governorates of Kasserine, Sidi Bou Sid, Kerouen and Gafsa). Unsustainable practices are having severe impacts on one of the country's most prominent and valuable ecosystems, the high steppes dominated by Alfa (*Stipa tenacissima*, Poaceae). The region is also home to a key subset of Tunisia's terrestrial biodiversity and remains one of the most marginalized in the country in socio-economic terms. The project focuses on rangeland management and rehabilitation,

management of forests and protected areas and improved agricultural practices with the goal to enhance local ecosystems and livelihoods. The intended objectives and indicative activities are:

1. To safeguard and restore ecosystem functions through sustainable land management in the Tunisian Alfa Belt

- Build regional technical and institutional capacity for integrated natural resource management planning (in the context of decentralization)
- Develop a regional-level land use planning and implementation system that integrates socio-economics, sustainable natural resource use, biodiversity, surface and groundwater water resource availability and climate change projections
- Extend sustainable land management to selected vulnerable communities: provide training and incentives for the uptake of improved land management practices; participatory land and livestock management agreements with communities and NGOs; rangeland set-asides; conservation farming; soil and water conservation measures; etc.

2. To conserve and restore critical biodiversity and forest ecosystems within and beyond Mghilla, Jebel Orbata and Jebel Zaghdoud protected areas (PAs)

- Equip PAs with basic infrastructure and staff adapted to the needs of the innovative management models to be developed/applied under the project
- Develop and implement innovative management and financing plans for the PAs
- Compensate local communities for forest conservation and restoration efforts inside PAs
- Collect seeds/seedlings/saplings of native plants in PAs and use them for enrichment planting and reforestation in suitable locations across the landscape

The launch of the project is expected in early 2018 following the completion of the preparatory phase, including the reception of the funds from the GEF.



LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY, TARGET SETTING, LEBANON

In partnership with the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD, and following a request for assistance from the Government of Lebanon, the Programme provided technical support for the development of voluntary targets to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) - i.e. to halt and reverse land degradation – by 2030 in-line with SDG Target 15.3.

The innovative aspect of LDN, that differentiates it from previous efforts to tackle land degradation, is the adoption of neutrality as the goal. This is achieved through the adoption of measures to avoid or reduce land degradation, combined with measures to reverse past degradation. The objective is to balance anticipated losses in land resources with measures that produce alternative gains through sustainable land management and restoration.



The LDN targets for Lebanon were developed on-time for UNCCD/COP13 (China, September 2017). The process provided an opportunity for coordination across ministries and sectors involved in land management. A “National LDN Target Setting Leverage Plan” was prepared to identify and tap into specific opportunities to achieve LDN (or SDG Target 15.3). The status of land degradation was assessed (baseline), the legal and institutional environment was analyzed, and trends and drivers of land degradation were assessed. Voluntary targets were then developed, reflecting the country’s ambition to reach LDN. Large-scale transformative projects and innovative financing opportunities were identified to support the drive towards LDN.

The good practices and lessons learnt from the LDN target setting process in Lebanon will be shared during a side event organized by UNDP during UNCCD/COP13 and bringing together countries from different regions.

Women play an important role in drylands development, managing land, crops, forestry and water resources. However, women not only experience the marginalization of the dryland zone where they live, but they also face specific forms of discrimination related to gender and other kinds of social difference. The advancement of gender equality is an essential development goal and vital to achieving sustainable and inclusive drylands development.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment was a core commitment of the Programme. Interventions were supported both at the global and national levels to advance this agenda. *At the global level, the support was provided within the framework of UNCCD process as highlighted above in Section 2.* At the national level, the support included:

1. Advisory services to promote gender equality and women empowerment in drylands development policy;
2. Technical support for the development of gender-sensitive programs and projects;
3. Design of innovative interventions that benefit both women and men at the local level; and
4. Facilitation of experience exchange between Programme countries.

In addition to stepping-up its gender support within country projects (vertical integration), the Programme promoted specific initiatives to enhance the role of women in local development (horizontal integration). Significant results were achieved on the ground as reflected below.



In **Morocco**, the Network of Locally Elected Women was established and its capacity strengthened to influence local development processes in the Southern Oases. Specific targeting of women was also promoted under the livelihoods and land/water interventions of the Programme as described above in Sections 4 and 5.



In **Lebanon**, the production and marketing capacities of women agri-food cooperatives were strengthened and their resilience to the pressures resulting from the Syria crisis was enhanced. Agri-food cooperatives hold enormous potential for empowering women, strengthening their technical skills and capacity to engage in income generating activities.

In **Tunisia**, the living conditions of poor marginalized communities, primarily women headed households in El-Brek/Kasserine, were improved through the implementation of priority interventions to enhance livelihoods and land/water management. The role of women in the governance of drinking water in rural areas was also strengthened and access to clean drinking water was improved.



In **Syria**, technical assistance was provided to secure income and improve food security for vulnerable groups, mainly women-headed households, within the framework of UN efforts to restore and stabilize the livelihoods of people affected by the conflict in the country.

The final evaluation of the Programme commended the significant efforts and results achieved to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in partner countries. The evaluation concluded that “the budget planned for gender and women’s empowerment activities was around 10% of the total funding approved by the Government of Finland for the Programme. The actual expenditures made through all Programme activities that have served women’s empowerment was about 25-26 % of the total budget, exceeding clearly the planned 10% allocation, as the Programme Team has exerted conscious efforts to promote this agenda in all its activities wherever possible. In addition to be a separate result of the Programme, gender equality and women’s empowerment was a cross-cutting issue considered under all of the result areas”.

A website was created to share the knowledge generated by the Programme including the reports, publications and audiovisual materials produced by partner countries. The website provided an overview of the Programme, its areas of interventions and country projects. It provided regular updates on on-going activities such as partners' meetings and Conferences of the Parties of the UNCCD, and included an "In Focus" section to highlight major Programme interventions such as the "Response to the Syria Crisis" or "Improving Access to Drinking Water in Rural Tunisia". The policy advocacy and technical reports published by the Programme were featured on the website, along with a selection of resource documents on sustainable drylands development.

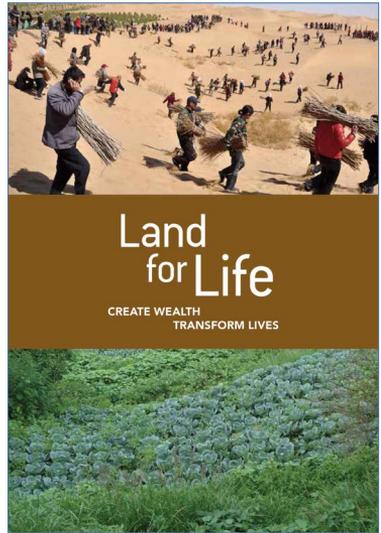
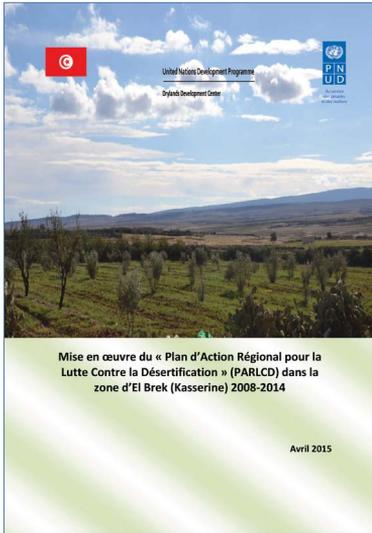
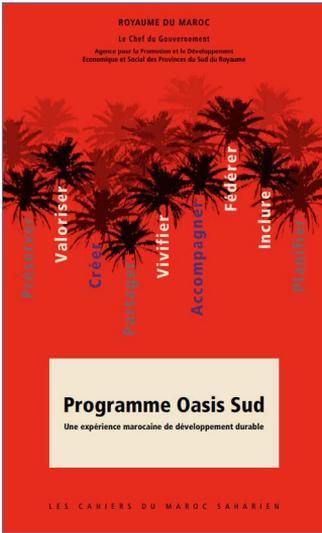


Within the framework of its exit strategy, the Programme and its partners invested significant efforts to document and share the good practices and lessons learnt from implementation. Prominent among these efforts was the preparation of major publications on 'Programme Oasis Sud' (POS) in Morocco and "El-Brek/Kasserine" in Tunisia, as well as a series of videos on the "Governance of Drinking Water in Rural Areas" to support national replication and scaling-up efforts in Tunisia. The POS experience was shared globally through a case study, "Living Oasis - The Fight against Desertification in Morocco", published in the prestigious publication "Land for Life – Create Wealth, Transform Lives" (World Bank, 2016, pp. 68-82).

The POS publication served as the substantive basis for a South-South Cooperation mission organized by the Programme in Asrir/Tighmert, Morocco, in March 2015. Four French-speaking partner countries participated in this mission namely Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. The main objective was to facilitate experience exchange in terms of sustainable, resilient and inclusive development in the drylands at two levels: i) At the national level in Morocco to share the successful practices of POS with various actors involved in development processes in the country; and ii) At the regional level among decision makers and development practitioners from participating countries. The exchange mission was structured around the following themes: a) Strategic planning and local governance; b) Social economy; and c) Women empowerment.

Two additional meetings were organized in Tunisia (2013) and Jordan (2014) to facilitate networking and experience exchange among partner countries. The missions featured national efforts to: a) Improve access to safe drinking water in poor rural areas in Tunisia; and b) Integrate sustainability considerations, particularly sustainable land management and

biodiversity conservation, in tourism sector development in Jordan. Moreover, side events were organized during COP11 in Windhoek and COP12 in Ankara - with strong participation from partner countries – to share Programme experience with a global audience.



The Programme shared its experience on the “Empowerment of Dryland Women” at the first and second Gender Policy Forums, organized by the UNCCD during COP11 and COP12 with the support of the Programme and the Government of Finland. Policy publications on the “Empowerment of Dryland Women” with respect to land rights, local governance and resilience building were prepared by the Programme to facilitate dialogue among country parties.



The final evaluation of the Programme concluded that “support to the documentation of good practices and lessons learned, along with the dissemination of the materials produced and the facilitation of experience exchange between partner countries, have worked towards the sustainability of Programme results. Awareness raising regarding the importance of sustainable drylands development was one of the key activities of the Programme. The contribution to policy advocacy was an integral part of the Programme, which has influenced dryland policies in partner countries and within UNDP through active support to knowledge sharing and dissemination”.

Following the closure of the Programme website, the most relevant and current documentation was transferred to the website of the UNDP Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification, the institutional home of the Programme (http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/global-policy-centres/sustainable_landmanagement/integrated_drylandsdevelopmentprogramme/).

The Programme has accumulated considerable knowledge in catalyzing inclusive and sustainable development in drylands. This section provides a synthesis of the good practices and lessons learnt from its implementation.

▶ INTEGRATED APPROACH

The Programme adopted an integrated approach to drylands development, addressing poverty and environment challenges and with action at different levels:

- a) Advocacy for an enabling policy environment for drylands development at the local, national and international levels;
- b) Building the capacity of relevant institutions at the national and local levels;
- c) *Enhancing dryland livelihoods* by: improving the productivity and market value of land-based activities; and diversifying income sources to lessen the pressure on the natural resource base (ecotourism, vocational jobs, handicrafts, etc.); and
- d) *Promoting sustainable management of land and water resources* – soil conditioning, terracing, tree planting, water harvesting, provision of clean drinking water, etc.

▶ RESPONDING TO NATIONAL NEEDS

The Programme supported the integration of drylands development priorities into national planning and budgeting frameworks, including UNDP Country Programmes. This was crucial for bringing attention, building strong ownership and securing financial resources from national budgets for addressing these priorities through the interventions supported by the Programme. The advantages of mainstreaming are clear in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Jordan where significant financial resources were mobilized from national budgets to support poverty alleviation and natural resource management in marginalized rural communities.

The Programme adopted a flexible implementation strategy which allowed it to respond to emerging national priorities, particularly in relation to the repercussions of the Syria crisis in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. It provided technical assistance for the implementation of the response plans in these countries, helping in the mobilization of partners and resources for the interventions supported by the Programme.

▶ CATALYTIC USE OF DONOR RESOURCES

The Programme acted as a catalyst for promising initiatives in partner countries. It provided technical advice for the development of these initiatives, convened interested partners and invested seed funding for their development and implementation. This approach paved the way to major multi-donor initiatives benefiting many beneficiaries (about 30,000 direct beneficiaries as per the final evaluation). As such, the Programme made efficient catalytic use of the official development assistance provided by the Government of Finland to mobilize significant additional financial resources – public and private, domestic and international – to drive the transformation towards sustainability in the drylands.

▶ WORKING AT THE SUB-NATIONAL/LOCAL LEVEL

Strengthening the capacities of stakeholders at the sub-national/local level was essential for achieving the positive results of the Programme. Sub-national/local stakeholders were fully engaged in the design and implementation of Programme interventions. Successful examples include the elaboration of Community Development Plans and strengthening the Network of Locally Elected Women in southern Morocco; building the capacities of Water Users' Association to provide clean drinking water in rural Tunisia; establishing a monitoring and evaluation system at the sub-national/local level to support the implementation of the Rural Renewal Program in Algeria; strengthening the capacity of the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority to minimize the impacts of tourism on biodiversity and land degradation; and improving the production and marketing capacities of women agri-food cooperatives in villages hosting Syrian refugees in Lebanon.



▶ TARGETING POVERTY POCKETS

Partner countries were all middle-income countries. Programme activities targeted marginal areas and communities affected by land degradation and poverty, i.e. the poverty pockets - for example the Governorate of Kasserine in Tunisia, the poor villages of the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon and the poor communities of Southern Morocco. It promoted an inclusive approach to development at the local level, advocated for integrating these areas in the national development agenda and supported the mobilization of financial resources for their development. It thus helped address inequalities in access to development, a major problem in partner countries.

▶ SUPPORTING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women play an important role in drylands development, managing land, crops, forestry and water resources. However, women not only experience the marginalization of the dryland zone where they live, but they also face specific forms of discrimination related to gender and other kinds of social difference. The advancement of gender equality is essential for sustainable and inclusive drylands development.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment was a core commitment of the Programme. Interventions were supported in partner countries to advance this agenda. For example, in Morocco, ecotourism activities targeted women's groups building their skills, supporting their engagement in income generating activities (accommodation, catering and handicrafts) and strengthening their participation in local development. In Tunisia, interventions aimed at strengthening women's role in local development, enhancing their access to basic energy and water services, and diversifying their livelihoods through fruit tree production.



▶ SUSTAINABILITY OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Ensuring the sustainability of achievements was an integral consideration of Programme design. A sustainability strategy was adopted at the onset of the Programme including the following elements:

- **Securing national ownership:** The design of the Programme was inclusive with the national partners fully engaged in the planning of the interventions. The partners were directly involved in the implementation of the Programme, including through an active role in its Advisory Committee.
- **Mobilizing funding from national resources:** The strong ownership of the interventions led to a significant mobilization of financial resources from national sources (about 50% of the total budget allocated for the interventions). The national contributions varied from one country to another, depending on the enabling policy environment in the respective country.
- **Strengthening capacities of national partners:** The partners led the design and implementation of the interventions, with technical guidance provided by the Programme, leading to enhanced capacities and institutionalization of results. Positive institutional changes were noted by the final evaluation in partner ministries (e.g. institutionalization of monitoring and evaluation system; improving communication modalities; strengthening local governance of drinking water; etc.). The livelihoods of local beneficiaries were also enhanced through the establishment of financially viable business models and entities.
- **Documenting and sharing Programme experience:** The Programme and its partners invested significant efforts to document and share the good practices and lessons learnt from implementation. The materials developed served to support national replication and scaling-up efforts, as well as to share experience among partner countries. Knowledge products were also disseminated globally within UNCDD processes and in international publications.
- **Supporting national scaling-up efforts:** The interventions were implemented within the framework of larger national initiatives which provided an enabling framework for the Programme to support replication and scaling-up of good practices (Programme Oasis Sud in Morocco, Rural Renewal Program in Algeria, Rural Water Governance Programme in Tunisia).

“Sustainability was further enhanced by the multi-level approach adopted by the Programme, working at the policy and practice levels as well as on the national, regional and local levels. There was clear evidence that national efforts to drive the transformation towards sustainability will continue following the closure of the Programme” (*Final Evaluation Report, January 2017*).



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Resilient nations.*