

Achieving the UNCCD 10 Year Plan Strategic Objective 2 “to improve the condition of affected ecosystems”: lessons from the DESIRE project



Maude Gentit

Field visit with local stakeholders – Tunisia

One of the most important objectives of the UNCCD over the coming years is to improve the condition of ecosystems affected by desertification (Strategic Objective 2). The goal is to improve and sustain agricultural productivity and the provision of ecosystem services, and so to sustain the livelihoods of some of the poorest communities in the world (expected impact 2.1), reduce the area affected by land degradation (indicator S-4) and increase net primary productivity in affected areas (indicator S-5).



A. Zeiliger, 2008

The UNCCD, and the 10 year Strategic Plan and Framework

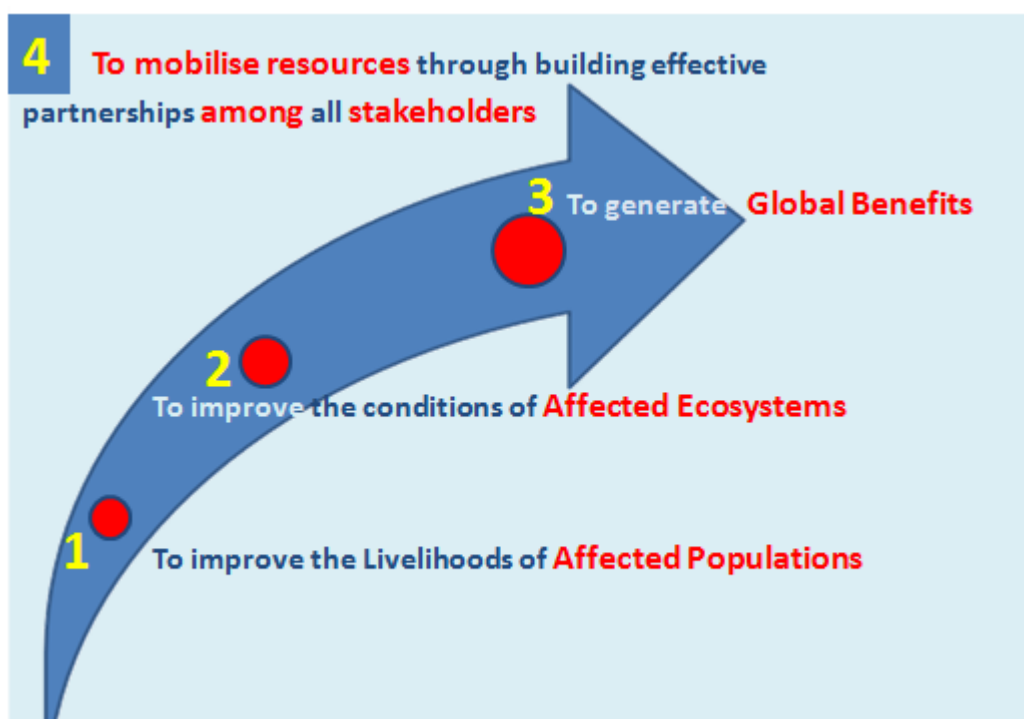
For a long time land degradation and desertification have been ignored among the priorities of international agendas. However since the UNCCD came into being in 1996, food crises, armed conflicts, migration, rural poverty, and evidence of impending climate change have contributed to a new focus. The Strategy adopted by decision 3/COP.8 in 2007 as the 10-year Strategic Plan and Framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) will be on the agenda of the next COP10 in Korea in October 2011.

The Strategy provides a unique opportunity to address some of the Convention's key challenges: to capitalise on its strengths, to seize opportunities provided by the new policy and financing environment, and to create a new, revitalised common ground for all UNCCD stakeholders. The Strategy contains the "strategic objectives" to be achieved over the 10 years, and the "operational objectives" that guide the actions of short and medium term effects.

It was hoped that the 10-year Plan would initiate more practical approaches, but the review made at CRIC 9 in February 2011 showed that many affected countries had not yet aligned their National Action Plan to the strategy because of lack of funds. In addition, it is difficult to establish a reliable toolbox of technical and organisational options. Best practices are being collected into the new PRAIS* databases, but there are problems to overcome with harmonization, classification, evaluation and validation. A call is being made to the Committee for Science and Technology, and all stakeholders, particularly the research institutes and the organizations of civil society, to contribute to the improvement of knowledge management in order to overcome these obstacles. As COP10 will take a decision on an evaluation to be conducted on the strategy and its implementation, the proposals made should be taken into account.

*PRAIS, *Performance review and Assessment of Implementation System*

http://www.unccd.int/prais/docs/PRAIS_user_manual%20v.1.3_en.pdf



The Four Strategic Objectives of the 10-Year Strategy: see <http://www.unccd.int/cop/cop9/menu.php>

Recommendations from the DESIRE Project

The DESIRE Project is now completing 5 years of testing methodology to choose and trial Sustainable Land Management (SLM) approaches and technologies. A number of important lessons have emerged. Sustainable Land Management options need to be **developed and evaluated by capitalising on close collaboration of scientists with stakeholders**, and tailoring options to local needs and priorities. Recommendations for researchers and stakeholders to achieve successful outcomes together include:

- Check that **the right people** are being contacted. Systematically include representatives of groups who are affected by desertification (including those who are typically marginalised) and those who have the power to influence the adoption of SLM technologies and approaches



DESIRE stakeholders discuss suggestions for SLM technologies they may try out

- Consider **local knowledge and traditional approaches** to land management alongside the latest technologies emerging from the research community – both need critical reflection and it may be possible to usefully combine insights from both

- **Involve stakeholders as early as possible** in the deliberation of SLM goals and the development and selection of SLM options, because their local knowledge and culture influence the design of SLM technologies and approaches



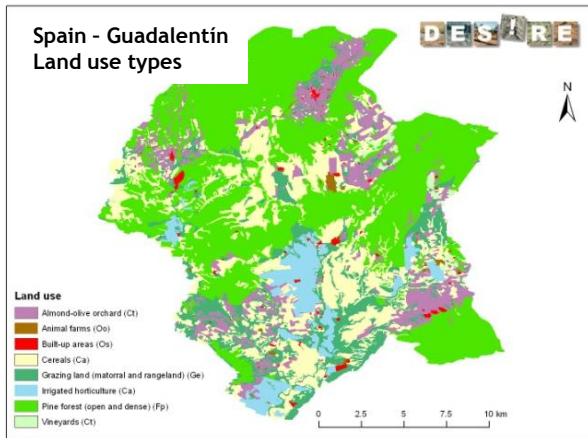
DESIRE stakeholders learn about land degradation

- Stakeholder collaboration allows tailoring SLM options to local needs and priorities, recognising that these will **differ in perspective** between groups and probably **change over time**
- Seek and negotiate stakeholder **commitment** in the implementation and monitoring of SLM technologies to enhance ownership and successful adoption
- Participative approaches applied by DESIRE scientists have proven to facilitate multi-stakeholder **learning** which provides a sound basis for future collaboration towards more SLM

DESIRE does not believe that there are set recipes for success, but DESIRE research has helped to provide methodology to **identify the most promising remediation strategies**.



Sustainable land management



Expert assessment map using LADA/WOCAT/DESIRE methodology for the Guadalentín area of Spain (G. van Lynden, ISRIC)

Sustainable Land Management needs to be **underpinned by rigorous scientific research** to ensure expectations are met when they are applied in different contexts – increasing productivity whilst protecting important ecosystem services and reducing land degradation.

- It requires rigorous impact assessment going beyond the monitoring of project outputs to evaluate whether the expected bio-physical and socio-economic benefits have been realised.
- Standardized assessment and documentation with the help of the WOCAT tools allows comparing implemented SLM technologies and

approaches across sites and learning from the experiences of others.

- To assure the quality and usefulness of information, scattered SLM knowledge needs to be identified, documented and assessed through a thorough, critical and interactive review process that involves land users, technical specialists and scientists.*
- SLM technologies and associated approaches need to be flexible and responsive to changing complex ecological and socio-economic environments.*
- A structured process where SLM options are identified and assessed locally together with stakeholders and then negotiated and selected for thereafter test implementation has proven to be effective. The implementation and monitoring phase needs to take into account the criteria for success as identified by the stakeholders before.

* See also WOCAT 2007: Where the land is greener - case studies and analysis of soil and water conservation initiatives worldwide. Editors: HP. Liniger and W. Critchley. CTA, FAO, UNEP and CDE, Berne, Switzerland.

Identification of existing and potential strategies with a participatory learning approach (stakeholder workshop 1)	Assessment Evaluation, documentation and sharing of strategies with the standardised WOCAT questionnaires	Selection of the most promising strategies with a decision support tool (stakeholder workshop 2)	Implementation of the selected SLM technology and impact monitoring

Structured process to identify, assess, select and implement SLM strategies (G. Schwilch, CDE)

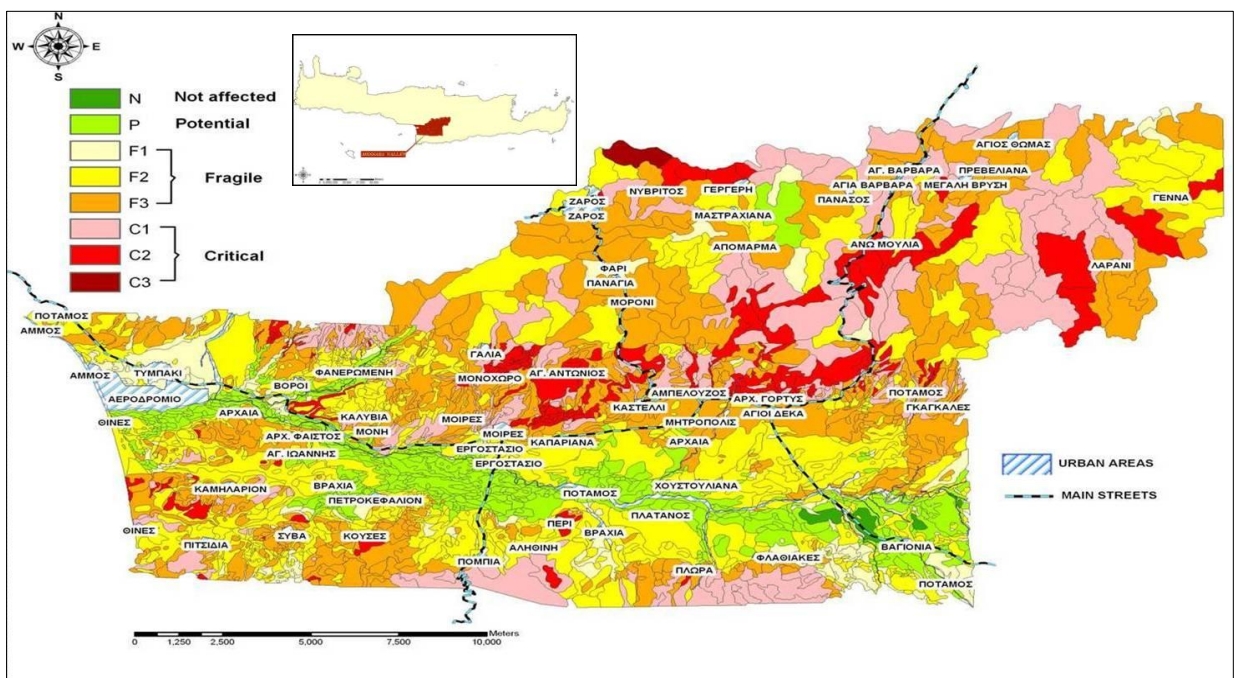
Mapping and monitoring

Land degradation **monitoring using indicators** (Strategy indicator S-4, the area affected by land degradation) **needs to involve local stakeholders**, to ensure monitoring results feed into future more sustainable land management decisions. Yet, **monitoring must be scientifically rigorous**. By reducing the number of global indicators to a minimum list that is relevant across all affected Parties (including just two, S-4 and S-5 for improving the condition of ecosystems), it is only possible to examine general trends, which may be useful for the UNCCD, but which is of limited value for national and local decision-makers. However, DESIRE, building on previous MEDALUS and DESERTLINKS methodology, can provide sets of indicators related to desertification for most spatial levels. DESIRE has shown that it is possible to extract a minimised set of indicators (around 50) from all those developed at local to national levels (about 200), that are reproducible and can be applied internationally. These can be used to provide more useful and practical guidance

for a wide-range of decision-makers.

Complimentary to the structured process to identify, assess, select and implement Sustainable Land Management (SLM) strategies is a method to map degradation and conservation, developed by the LADA, WOCAT and DESIRE programs. It evaluates what type of land degradation is actually happening where, and what is done about it in terms of SLM. (See map on previous page.)

Linking the information obtained through the mapping questionnaire to a Geographical Information System (GIS) permits the production of maps as well as area calculations on various aspects of land degradation and conservation. The on-line map database is hosted by WOCAT, and the mapped outputs that can be generated from this database provide a powerful tool to obtain an overview of land degradation and conservation in a country, a region, or worldwide.



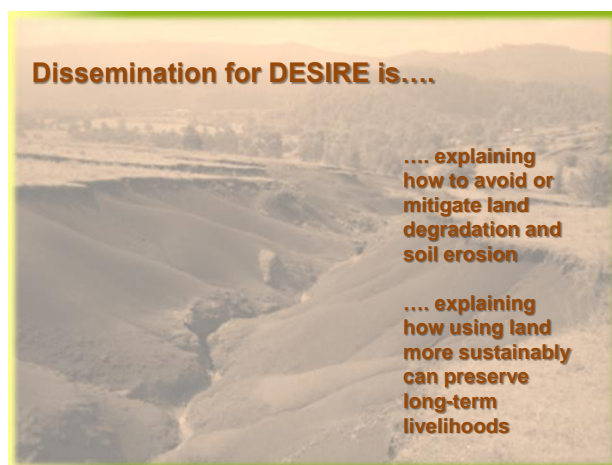
Use of an expert system to assess desertification status and risk on the Greek island of Crete using the MEDALUS/DESERTLINKS/DESIRE indicators. (Costas Kosmas and Christos Karavitis, Agricultural University of Athens)

Sharing the knowledge

DESIRE recognises that **information and knowledge held by researchers and a limited number of non-scientist stakeholders must be shared much more effectively** in order that the research results may achieve the maximum possible impact in desertification-affected countries. Therefore DESIRE is using a wide range of media, from the written word to videos and podcasts, to explain the science and recommendations. DESIRE uses applications of new information technologies e.g. social networking platforms such as Twitter, especially now that access to the

internet is available on mobile phones as well as on computers and laptops.

The DESIRE Project makes project results and recommendations available in a web-based Harmonised Information System, presented in non-scientific language in English and translated to other languages of the DESIRE study sites: <http://www.desire-his.eu/>. This is a direct information service for those who have internet access, and provides printable material to be circulated in traditional ways to those who do not.



P. Banton, 2006

Selected References from the DESIRE Project

- Reed, M. S., et al. (2011), Cross-scale monitoring and assessment of land degradation and sustainable land management: A methodological framework for knowledge management. *Land Degradation & Development*, 22: 261–271.
- Schwilch G, Bachmann F, Liniger HP. (2009). Appraising and selecting conservation measures to mitigate desertification and land degradation based on stakeholder participation and global best practices. *Land Degradation & Development* 20: 308–326.

This brief has been compiled by: Mark Reed (U. Aberdeen), Gudrun Schwilch (CDE, Berne), Patrice Burger (CARI, France), Marie José van der Werff ten Bosch (BothENDS, Netherlands), Simone Verzandvoort (ALTErra, Netherlands), Nichola Geeson (MEDES, Italy)

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For more information and contact details see:

- The DESIRE Harmonised Information System: www.desire-his.eu and DESIRE website: www.desire-project.eu

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Website: www.desire-project.eu

Contact DESIRE coordinator: Coen.Ritsema@wur.nl

Contact DESIRE Communications: ngproject3@googlemail.com

Contact EU Scientific Officer: Marie.Yeroyanni@ec.europa.eu

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