



Earth Summit Bulletin

Vol. 1 No. 7

Published by Island Press with contributions from the NGO community

10 March 1992

DESERTIFICATION

THE NEGLECTED ISSUE AT PREPCOM

According to many developing countries, desertification has been the neglected issue on the UNCED agenda. Due to problems with document availability at PrepCom III and a preoccupation by Working Group I participants with other issues, this agenda item has been denied critical attention. At the insistence of African countries, it was decided that Working Group I would put this issue at the top of its agenda at PrepCom IV.

At PrepCom III, work on this issue did not begin until the third week and discussion of PC/62 was cut short by lack of time. Many African delegates were highly critical of PC/42/Add.2 (the proposed Agenda 21 programme areas) on the basis that it was "grossly inarticulated" and "inadequately focused." In addition, many African countries expressed their concern that the issue of poverty be appropriately addressed within the context of this debate and they urged that the allocation and flow of resources in desertification control must address biomass and energy problems; modification of lifestyles; and, where needed, protection of species and fragile ecosystems. The African delegations also wanted special attention on temperate deserts, where the rate of water loss in the soils is lower than in tropical deserts. They also urged that a more integrated approach be taken to the whole issue. The Germans were concerned that the problem of desertification had deteriorated since the 1977 Nairobi Plan of Action was adopted, due in part to inappropriate land use and the overuse of agricultural and pastoral lands.

The compilation of government views on this issue was expressed in document W.G.I/L.29. In addition to requesting that the Secretariat present revised proposals for action on the subjects of desertification and drought, the decision requested that additional comments on these program areas be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by 15 September 1991.

The views of the governments expressed at PrepCom III and in writing to the Secretariat are expressed in document PC/100/Add.17, "Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Combating Desertification and Drought," as well as PC/110, "Soil Protection: Desertification and Drought," a compilation on desertification and drought submitted by the Government of Tunisia, and PC/118, a report on the activities of the Sahel and Sahara Observatory.

The International Conference on Impacts of Climatic Variations and Sustainable Development in Semi-Arid Regions (ICID) was held from 27 January until 1 February 1991 in Fortaleza, Brazil. This conference was organized by the Esquel Foundation of Brazil, and brought together more than 1200 scientists, politicians, economists and NGOs, representing more than 20 countries. Sixty papers and case studies were discussed.

The Conference discussed many climatic, ecological and socio-economic problems common to arid lands, with the aim of tabling a set of demands and proposals for the sustainable development of these regions which are embodied in the Declaration of Fortaleza at PrepCom IV.

The primary conference recommendations include:

- The environmentally sustainable economic and social development of semi-arid regions must be pursued as the ultimate goal, mainly because the origin of poverty and environmental degradation in these areas is basically economic and political.
- Development must be understood as including the equitable distribution of wealth and access to resources, with respect for the local diversity, control of the desertification process, and prevention of the abusive use of bio-diversity. It must also include the participation and the political commitment of the civil society, structural reforms, land-tenure reform and improved agricultural policies and education at the national and regional levels.

PREPCOM HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 9 MARCH 1992

WORKING GROUP I

The first formal session of Working Group I at PrepCom IV was convened by the Swedish Chair, Bo Kjellén. He moved immediately to procedural matters, announcing his work plan and the deadlines for governments to submit 200 copies of each proposed amendment to the documents to be discussed. Desertification is the first issue to be tackled by the group. All amendments to PC/100/Add.17 are to be delivered by 10:00 am today.

The issue of managing fragile ecosystems and promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development will be dealt with this Thursday and Friday. All amendments must be submitted by 11 March. Juan Antonio Mateos of Mexico will hold private meetings with delegations on this agenda item during the week.

Working Group I will consider deforestation next week. Charles Liburd of Guyana, the convener of the Contact Group on Forests, will hold informal consultations this week. The Chair asked that all submissions by governments be received by the Working Group secretary by 6:00 pm on 13 March.

The conservation of biological diversity and protection of the atmosphere (climate change, ozone depletion and transboundary air pollution) will be scheduled as the last agenda items by Working Group I.

Kjellén reflected on the evolving character of this Working Group and the excellent atmosphere and willingness to work and cooperate that had evolved over the last year and a half together. On that note, he transformed the formal session into an informal meeting on the first agenda item.

PC/100/Add.17, "Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Combating Desertification and Drought" was the first item of business. Nigeria, on behalf of the African Group, circulated its document of proposed amendments to Add.17. Kjellén began moving paragraph-by-paragraph through the text starting with the introduction and the first programme areas. One new programme area was introduced, calling for popular participation and environmental education that focuses on desertification and managing the effects of drought. By lunch the group had agreed on the content of the first ten paragraphs.

The afternoon session examined paragraphs 10 through 23 that deal with issues such as environmental information systems; ongoing studies on the consequences of desertification; the rehabilitation of desertified lands; and wood-fuel consumption. The issue of monitoring by the military of degrading semi-arid lands was raised, causing problems with several developing country delegations. Conflict appeared to arise over whether the responsibility for data collection and dissemination rests at the international or national level. The issue of rehabilitation of arid soils was raised by Libya. The rest of the afternoon was spent trying to find the proper wording to describe fuel-wood. The problem still remains as to how the questions raised on this agenda item will be integrated into Working Group II's consideration of freshwater resources.

OCEANS (WORKING GROUP II)

Working Group II convened for the first time in PrepCom IV yesterday morning. After a brief formal session to adopt the revised agenda for the working group, the Chair, Bukar Shaib of Nigeria, converted the meeting into an informal session to discuss item two on the agenda -- oceans. According to the revised schedule, Working Group II will address oceans this week. Next week, discussion will focus on freshwater resources and toxic chemicals on 17 March; hazardous and radioactive wastes and freshwater resources on 19 March; and hazardous wastes on 20 March.

Shaib began the informal session by commenting that at the end of PrepCom III, the progress made in the discussion on

oceans was, on the whole, unsatisfactory. The working group had asked the Secretariat to prepare a revised "Options for Agenda 21" document, indicating the origin of the various proposals and a compilation document of all amendments made at Prep-Com III. These requests are now reflected in PC/100/Add.21 and PC/104, respectively. The Secretariat also introduced the other documents that deal with oceans: PC/113, a series of recommendations from the UNEP December meeting in Nairobi (the document will be ready tomorrow); L.18 and L.24 from PrepCom III and PC/124, a document pertaining to the recent meeting of the London Dumping Convention.

Despite Shaib's concern about the complexity of the documentation and the little time available for discussion, a good part of the morning was spent discussing procedural matters. Would document PC/100/Add.21 form the basis for negotiations? Would the document be negotiated section-by-section or paragraph-by-paragraph? Most countries supported the use of PC/100/Add.21 as the negotiating text. It was finally agreed that the process of negotiation (i.e., by paragraphs or sections) was not really an issue. Shaib proposed beginning the discussion with paragraph 5, since paragraphs 1 through 3 are explanatory notes and paragraph 4 should not be discussed until all of the programme areas are agreed upon. Thus, discussion finally began on Programme Area A: "Integrated Management and Sustainable Development of Coastal Areas, Exclusive Economic Zones [and Marine Ecosystems]."

After a long debate over whether the phrase "and Marine Ecosystems" should be included in the title or deleted, Brazil finally recommended that the working group first look at the contents of Programme Area A and then return to the title (once the contents are agreed upon). Shaib thought this was a good suggestion since the debate had not progressed any further than it had in PrepCom III.

The rest of the morning was spent discussing paragraphs 5 and 6 included under the sub-heading "Basis for Action." Most of the debate on these two paragraphs was editorial rather than substantive. These paragraphs are statements on the importance of coastal areas and the degradation of coastal resources. Delegates did not appear to disagree with the underlying ideas.

The afternoon's discussion moved from paragraph 7 to 14. At first glance, this may look like progress, however, when it is considered that there are 152 paragraphs in PC/100/Add.21, the discussions barely made a dent in the agenda. In brief, decisions were made to delete paragraph 7 altogether and to establish a small contact group to work on paragraphs 8, 9, and 10, under the subheading "Objectives," and paragraphs 12 and 13, under the subheading "Activities." The contact group was established to clarify what the objectives of this programme area are supposed to be and how the activities relate to the objectives. It is hoped that this contact group will report back to the working group today with a new set of objectives and a revised list of management-related activities. Working Group II will continue discussing paragraph 14 on data and information when it reconvenes this morning.

The day's discussion on oceans frustrated delegates and observers alike. The slow pace of the negotiations, coupled with the constant revisiting of those issues that had been supposedly agreed upon earlier in the day, unnecessarily prolonged the discussion of the first 14 paragraphs of PC/100/Add.21. If this pace continues, it is unlikely that Working Group II will be able to complete its agenda.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY AT PREPCOM

WORKING GROUP I: The Minister of Burkina Faso will address a formal session of Working Group I at 10:00 am, and immediately afterwards the proceedings will revert to an informal session on desertification. The delegates will continue discussion of PC/100/Add.17. It is believed that the African States will propose that the PrepCom negotiate a convention on desertification ready for UNCED.

OCEANS (WORKING GROUP II): Discussion will continue today on PC/100/Add.21 on oceans. It is possible that the contact group established by the Chair will report back with its recommendations on the objectives and activities listed in paragraphs 8-13. Otherwise, discussion will resume with paragraph 14. Watch for the tenor of the discussion to change once delegates start to address the more contentious issues revolving around marine living resources. It is expected that PC/113 (a note by the Secretary-General of the Conference transmitting report of the intergovernmental meeting of designated experts on land-based sources of marine degradation and coastal activities) will be available today. There is growing support to incorporate the language contained in this document into PC/100/Add.21. There is also some discussion of a possible meeting in The Hague in August to address coastal zone management issues. This may have an impact on the extent to which coastal zone management issues will be addressed here at PrepCom IV.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER (PLENARY): When discussions on the technology transfer cluster of documents continue today, it is expected that the Vice-Chair, Bjornar Utheim, will open the session with a review of proposed amendments for PC/100/Add.10 (Science for Sustainable Development). These amendments are relatively few and non-contentious. Discussion on proposed amendments to PC/100/Add.9 (technology transfer), are expected to be more controversial, although it appears that the United States does not have serious problems with many of the amendments proposed by the G-77.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES (PLENARY): John Bell, Vice-Chair of the Financial Resources informal sessions has been conducting private consultations with the heads of the regional groups. By late afternoon, it is probable that he will privately circulate copies of the text to be negotiated at Wednesday's informal-informal session.

SCHEDULE OF PREPCOM IV EVENTS

OFFICIAL MEETINGS

March 10	10:00 am	UN Conference Room 1	Working Group I (formal followed by informal on desertification)	Open
March 10	10:00 am	UN Conference Room 4	Working Group II (oceans)	Open
March 10	3:00 pm	UN Conference Room 1	Working Group II (oceans)	Open
March 10	3:00 pm	UN Conference Room 4	Plenary (technology transfer)	Open

OTHER MEETINGS

March 10	9:00 am to 10:00 am	Conference Room C	NGO Strategy Session	NGOs
March 10	10:00 am to 12:00 pm	ASP Bldg. (313 E 43th St.) on Galotti Conf. Room	Strategy Meeting on Agenda 21	NGOs
March 10	10:00 am to 4:30 pm	LaBouisse Auditorium (UNICEF)	Getting Women's Views into the UNCED Documents	Open
March 10	10:00 am to 11:00 am	CCUN 11th Floor	Student Environmental Action Coalition	Members
March 10	2:00 pm to 3:00 pm	Conference Room C	Strategy Session for NGOs on official government delegations	NGO delegates
March 10	11:00 am to 1:00 pm	10th Floor CCUN	Habitat International Coalition	Open
March 10	1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	8th Floor CCUN	African NGOs (ASAFED)	Members
March 10	1:00 pm	Outside Delegates' Lounge	CANZ Meeting on Women in Environment and Development	CANZ Women NGOs and Delegates
March 10	2:00 pm	2nd Floor CCUN	NGO meeting on PC/100/Add.6	NGOs
March 10	2:00 pm	outside Conf. Room 4	NGO Group on Financial Resources	NGOs
March 10	3:00 pm to 4:00 pm	2nd Floor CCUN	South Pacific Meeting	Open
March 10	3:00 pm to 5:00 pm	CCUN Room 10H	Meeting on "Can Money Save the Environment?"	NGOs
March 10	6:00 pm to 8:00 pm	UN Conference Room 4	NGO - Government Dialogue and NGO Plenary	Open
March 10	7:00 pm to 9:30 pm	317 E. 52nd St.	Meeting with Nordic Government Delegations	NGOs