Implications of economic changes for dryland management at national and international levels

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have formulated and attempted to implement policies and strategies within the frameworks of their agriculture, forestry, rural development, settlement, land tenure and environment policies. In the early stages, such policies addressed (i) the growing need to expand or intensify agricultural production in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALS), (ii) desertification control and (iii) socio-economic development of the often marginalized ASAL populations. More recently, with the ratification of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), some countries have formulated comprehensive and integrated policies and plans (National Action Plans or NAPs) consistent with guidelines in Chapter 12 of Agenda 21. For example, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Cape Verde and Botswana have concluded their NAPs through comprehensive participatory consultations. Others like Eritrea, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe have only made pilot attempts at integrated policies and strategies.

Many SSA countries are struggling in their development with high debt and poverty levels. In addition, many countries are burdened by impacts of war, natural disasters and HIV/AIDS pandemic. The net result is that many of the countries have limited resources for the management of their natural resources, particularly those in drylands. On the other hand, increasing poverty is forcing the population to degrade the existing natural resources. For example, in many countries, drylands vegetation – being the safety net for the growing numbers of the poor - is under great threat. Thus, economic changes in the countries have major implications for dryland management at both national and international levels.

Some unique limitations in dryland management

Since the Rio Earth Summit (UNCED, 1992), global policy dialogue on forests has been broadened to focus on **all types of forests** including those in drylands**.** However, this broadened scope has yet to be fully recognized and addressed by foresters as many foresters still consider woodlands and savannah vegetation to be the responsibility of other professionals. Many countries now find themselves in a serious dilemma with respect to the needed knowledge and skills for effective management of their dryland resources. Moreover, the available traditional knowledge about the functioning and management of drylands is rapidly being lost.

In addition, in most countries, the bulk of dryland forests and woodlands exist in common access community trust lands and previous forest policies did not adequately provide for their sustainable management. Some countries are already addressing this limitation through forest policy and institutional reviews. However, such reviews are proving to be complex and slow.

There are biophysical limitations to dryland management, which become more severe with increasing extent of aridity. Thus, more resources are required for effective agriculture and forestry interventions in drylands, particularly for soil and water management. Many countries have developed sound plans for dryland management but lack the necessary resources to implement these plans. Some countries have relied on donor-supported projects in drylands but such support has declined steadily over the last decade.

Sustainable management of natural resources in dry zones calls for close integration with range management, wildlife management, and soil and water management. For example, support for rehabilitation of dry zone forests and desertification control will have a great impact on the livelihoods of marginalized pastoral communities as well as benefiting wildlife conservation.

Focus on poverty alleviation

In principle, SSA countries have adopted the eight millennium development goals (MDGs), which have been developed from world conferences organized by the United Nations in the past decade, including the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit. The MDGs have been accepted as a framework for planning and measuring development progress. For SSA countries, poverty alleviation remains the central MDG. Thus, the countries have made early efforts to elaborate their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and have refashioned their macroeconomic policies to be harmonized within the framework of their Poverty Eradication Action Plans (PEAPs).

An important consequence of the current focus on poverty alleviation is that governments have made significant switches in priorities for allocating their development resources. For example, a new government in Kenya has made a special budget allocation for the development of its ASALS. Similarly, the young government of national unity in South Africa is allocating more resources for development in the previously neglected dry woodlands (in former “homelands”). If governments sustain this poverty focus, the net effect might be that more resources could be directed to dryland management.

Some countries have recently undertaken comprehensive reviews of their agriculture and forestry policies and strategies. These reviews have also been done against a background of their overarching economic structural adjustment programmes and PEAPs. For example, Uganda has recently launched its Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (Kisamba-Mugerwa, 2002) and the new Uganda Forestry Policy (Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, 2001). These new national policies and strategies address national socio-economic development goals, food security and sustainable

management of forest resources. However, even these new policies are predicated on largely rain-fed agriculture and forestry production systems.

Pressure and conflicts over the use of drylands

Human catastrophes resulting from frequent droughts and famines have become characteristic features of some countries. For example, large parts of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia have arid and semiarid climates with low agricultural productivity. Successive years of low rainfall resulted in severe droughts, low agricultural production and food deficits. Vulnerability to droughts and famines is a key concern for governments and people as their recurrence forces radical shifts in resource allocation undermining options for socio-economic advancement.

In recent years, there have been inter-ethnic conflicts over grazing and water for livestock in some countries like Kenya where the Maasai and Boran communities have been forced to “invade” land of other communities to save their livestock at the peak of dry seasons. In some cases, such conflicts have taken trans boundary dimensions, for example, involving Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan in Eastern Africa. With increasing poverty levels, poor economic performance and political instability in some of the countries, it is to be expected that such conflicts will increase serious degradation of drylands.

Implications at international level

The widespread droughts of the early 1970s precipitated international dialogue culminating in the United Nations Conference on Desertification, held in Nairobi in 1977. Among other things, this conference drew the attention of desertification-affected countries to develop comprehensive national policies for sustainable management of their arid and semi-arid lands (ASALS). The direct outcomes of this conference included specific development initiatives like the Inter-States Committee to Combat Desertification in the Sahel (CILSS) for West African countries. Another outcome was the creation of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) to spearhead desertification control in SSA.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) was one of the three international agreements crafted during the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. Chapter 12 of Agenda 21 covers the international consensus on approaches and actions to be taken by countries in controlling desertification and managing drylands sustainably. Given the special development challenges and needs of African countries, the CCD has set up a special unit for Africa dedicated to continue the functions of UNSO.

Unfortunately, the above international dialogue on dryland management has not yet to result in significant increases in resource allocation for dryland management through international cooperation. On the contrary, donor support for dryland management in SSA has continued to decline.

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