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INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE FOR  
THE ELABORATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION  
TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN THOSE COUNTRIES  
EXPERIENCING SERIOUS DROUGHT AND/OR  
DESERTIFICATION, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA  
Seventh session  
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Agenda item 2

IMPLEMENTATION OF URGENT ACTION FOR AFRICA  
AND ACTION IN OTHER REGIONS:  
COMPILATION OF INFORMATION

**Contribution from the United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
(received on 19 May 1995)**

## U N E S C O

**UNESCO Summary Report on activities  
related to the implementation of the Convention to Combat  
Desertification**

Activities of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in the field of combating desertification, are carried out, in particular, within the intergovernmental/international programmes - the Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB), the International Hydrological Programme (IHP) and the International Geological Correlation Programme (IGCP) - as well as the joint UNEP/UNESCO International Environmental Education Programme. Within all four programmes, these activities have focused primarily on Africa, as explained hereafter. Their implementation will be pursued as a matter of urgency in response to the INCD resolution on urgent action for Africa in the context of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

In the light of strengthening the knowledge-base and developing information and monitoring systems for regions prone to desertification, UNESCO is actively involved in the setting-up of a Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS) in co-operation with UNEP, FAO, WMO and ICSU. The need for such an integrated multi-scale global monitoring system for the monitoring of long-term changes in terrestrial ecosystems has been recognised at an international workshop, held at Ury (France) in July 1992, under the aegis of the Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel (OSS), the Global Change and Terrestrial Ecosystems (GCTE) core project of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) and the MAB Programme of UNESCO. Moreover, UNESCO launched a new FRIEND (Flow Regimes from International Experimental Network Data) project for the study of river flow regimes in western and central Africa, which will give rise to the establishment of a database in this field. UNESCO is also actively involved in paleo-climate research and paleo-desert cartography.

Combating land degradation through intensified soil conservation and reforestation activities, as well as developing and strengthening integrated development programmes for the promotion of alternative livelihood systems in areas prone to desertification, is being addressed by UNESCO-MAB's field projects, such as the "Co-operative Integrated Project on Savannah Ecosystems in Ghana (CIPSEG)", funded by Germany, which studies environmental degradation of the savannah areas of northern Ghana, using sacred groves as reference areas and gene pools for the restoration of the adjoining savannah vegetation.

Another German financed project in the Aral Sea Basin, with the participation of scientists from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, focuses on interdisciplinary environmental studies in this ecological disaster region, drawing on several disciplines, such as ecology, limnology, ecotoxicology, hydrology and hydrogeology of the affected area, including aspects of efficient water use in irrigation and drainage, effects of pesticides and fertilisers, biological waste water treatment, and related matters.

Providing the scientific basis for developing comprehensive anti-desertification programmes and promoting environmental education is at the heart of the UNESCO regional project "Renforcement des capacités scientifiques des pays du Sahel dans le domaine agro-sylvo-pastoral (RCS-Sahel)", funded by Germany. As a collaborative initiative of the CILSS Member States, the Institut du Sahel, the Ecole Inter-Etats des Sciences et Médecine Vétérinaire in Dakar (Senegal) and UNESCO-MAB, the project provides for several regional training seminars on environmental problems targeted at technicians, as well as junior and senior researchers.

Within the framework of environmental education and information, UNESCO collaborates with the Institut du Sahel for the implementation of the Sahelian Education Programme on Drought and Desertification. A sub-regional seminar was sponsored by UNESCO in Bamako, in 1992, to provide training to teachers in environmental education, as was a school competition on the Sahelian environment, organized by CILSS in Ouagadougou in 1993. At the request of the Institut du Sahel, UNESCO will continue its co-operation with the CILSS Member States in a second phase as regards the Sahelian Education Programme on Drought and Desertification - the modalities for the further implementation of this programme will be discussed at a round-table meeting, to be held in Mauritania in early 1994.

UNESCO collaborates with the Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel (OSS) in the implementation of a project related to "Major Basin Aquifers", whose objective is to identify the major aquifers of the Sahara and Sahel region, evaluate their state of knowledge and contribute to the assessment of their water resources, for use in the development of these regions. At the launching meeting of the project in Cairo (November 1992), it was decided to establish two sub-projects: one related to the countries north of the Sahara, with the objective of conservation and co-operation for the management of the shared aquifers, and the establishment of a common monitoring network; the second sub-project deals with the countries south of the Sahara, which will draw the attention of decision-makers and the public to the importance of these aquifers for socio-economic development, and will set up a co-ordination structure for water resources management. UNESCO also co-operates with OSS and other international bodies on the use of satellite remote sensing data

and GIS systems for the monitoring of the environment in arid zones,

Capacity-building ranks high on UNESCO's agenda for the follow-up to UNCED with regard to desertification control. Originally planned to be held in 1993, but now postponed to 1994, UNESCO is organizing a UNEP-sponsored Training Course on Desertification Control in Zimbabwe for ten SADCC countries. This training course will allow participants to better address the problems of desertification in the southern African region.

UNESCO also contributed to international and regional co-operation by sponsoring international scientific meetings related to environmental problems in arid and semi-arid zones. UNESCO support was given to the symposium on *Prosopis* species, held at the Centre for Overseas Research and Development of the University of Durham (United Kingdom), in July 1992; the XVIIth International Grassland Congress, which was held in New Zealand and Australia from 8-21 February, 1993; an International Seminar on the Hydrogeology of Deep Carbonate Rocks (Tozeur (Tunisia) February 1993); and the Fourth International Conference on Desert Development, organized by the International Desert Development Commission (IDDC) in Mexico City (Mexico), from 25-30 July, 1993.