

South-South Cooperation: One approach to combat desertification

By Bettina Horstmann, Coordinator Africa Unit, Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to combat desertification (UNCCD), Bonn, Germany (www.unccd.int)

Article 11 of the UNCCD foresees the elaboration of subregional and regional action programmes to combat desertification: “Affected country Parties shall consult and cooperate to prepare subregional and/or regional action programmes to harmonize, complement and increase the efficiency of national programmes. Such cooperation may include agreed joint programmes for the sustainable management of transboundary natural resources, scientific and technical cooperation, and strengthening of relevant institutions.” More details are contained in the regional implementation annex for Africa.

So far, 4 subregional action programmes to combat desertification have been elaborated (southern Africa, western Africa and Chad, Maghreb, eastern Africa). The programme for the central African subregion is being finalised. Priority projects focussing on sustainable management of natural resources and capacity building have been included in the NEPAD Environment Initiative and some are being implemented, with the support of GEF, international and bilateral cooperation agencies.

At the regional level, 6 thematic programme networks (TPN) have been launched (water, agroforestry, rangelands, early warning systems, renewable energies, sustainable farming systems). TPNs are coordinated by a designated African institution and aim at bringing together interested institutions for more effective collaboration, coordination and harmonization of policies and strategies within the context of the Regional Action Programme to combat desertification in Africa. A regional coordination unit hosted by the African Development Bank, Tunis, supports the activities of the TPNs.

Finally, South-South cooperation is also existing at the interregional level: the UNCCD secretariat has been facilitating the establishment of an interregional platform of cooperation between Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Interregional thematic meetings have also been held between African and Asian countries. As a result, African experts attended a training in the Caribbean on soil salinisation, and participated in a workshop on early warning systems in China.