



الخطا : المحيط و التنمية في العالم العربي
enda inter-arabe environnement & développement du monde arabe

IDRC-funded Research Project on Combatting Desertification



Executive Summary

ENDA Inter-Arabe was established in 1990 and in 1992 decided to concentrate its field activities on urban development, an area where there were many problems in Tunisia but no NGOs operating. When it was invited to become involved in the IDRC-funded research project on combatting desertification, it accepted for several reasons: its co-directors both had backgrounds in the rural area, it had already undertaken an ecology-related project in Tunisia, and it was interested in contributing to encouraging Tunisian NGOs to join the battle.

However, at the time, the project had already been prepared so that ENDA-IA was unable to influence its design or adapt its methods and objectives to the special conditions reigning in North Africa, and especially Tunisia.

Project activities began immediately after the funding was received at end-March 1994.

The ultimate objective of the project was to "strengthen local communities through the provision of relevant information, so that they in turn can build a sufficient level of awareness and organisation to ensure the national governments, scientific institutions and the international community serve as instruments of the people and be accountable to them".

This would be achieved by increasing the policy-analytical capacities of the NGO, enabling it to provide relevant information, link the NGO to the scientific community, and advocate on behalf of local communities. The project partners were also to share information with NGOs in their sub-region.

Tunisia is a small country (16.4 million hectares) with a population of some 9 million. Its arable area is some 2.9 million hectares and much of the total agricultural area of 9 million hectares is threatened by water or wind erosion. As for water resources, they are becoming increasingly scarce and half of all water resources are at least mildly saline (over 1.5 grammes per litre).

In order to face up to the looming problems which this situation implies, the government is spending some \$200 million annually on forestation, pasture

M12C 441V
SS1.45 (6/1)
Ex 5

improvement, wind breaks, dune fixation and similar measures, as well as campaigns to educate the public in water saving.

Major causes of desertification in Tunisia are: population pressure on land, the break-down of traditional land use and land management patterns and structures, a decline in available pasture land concommittently with a rise in livestock numbers spurred by legislation, inappropriate cultivation and irrigation methods, and the introduction of mechanisation on fragile land.

Several public institutions are concerned with the combat against desertification, in particular the ministry of agriculture, the institute for arid regions, the ministry of the environment, the agency for protection of the environment, the office for water treatment, the agency for energy savings and others.

In general, Tunisian civil servants are well-qualified.

Tunisia played an active rôle in the preparation and negotiation of the International Convention on Desertification, and was among the first to ratify the treaty. It is also keen to begin implementing new actions, or strengthening ongoing ones, in application of the Convention. To this end, it is negotiating with GTZ for financial and technical support.

A new programme in this framework includes the establishment of a National Committee, a public education campaign, a National Action Plan which will modify the extant technocrat-prepared one, and a National Fund on Desertification. The Committee, which includes 8 representatives of NGOs, has so far met once. The Plan covers most of the evident items for an integrated combat against desertification (soil and water conservation, forestation, pasture improvement, economic and social measures and so on). Finance for the National Fund is being sought from outside donors and detailed plans being drawn up for its use.

It is generally acknowledged that most NGOs throughout the Arab region are still young and weak, especially in terms of field experience. In Tunisia, there are only three development NGOs with over 20 years experience and an NGO considers it has joined the ranks of "large" NGOs when its annual budget is above DT10 000. A major weakness of most NGOs is their voluntary nature, meaning they have no permanent professional staff. However, the GEF Small Grants Project in Tunisia is affording opportunities for NGOs to try their hands at field work (with varying degrees of success) and more professionals (sociologists, agronomists, geographers...) are becoming involved in NGO field work.

As for grassroots community organisations, it can be safely stated that in Tunisia at least, they simply no longer exist, having been suppressed by the colonial powers and then by the newly-independent government. This places a severe constraint on implementing the project's main objective.

Though the government's policy is to encourage and work with NGOs, their weaknesses, and the fact that many are composed of civil servants in any case, means that actual collaboration is rare, and lobbying activities are almost impossible. "Consultations" with NGOs are organised by the government but they seem to have little practical impact.

The weakness of the NGO sector, especially with regard to combatting desertification, is reflected in the absence of any progress on establishing an effective National Committee of RIOD. Though such a committee was set up in April 1996, and a three-NGO focal point elected, positively no activities have been conducted or any initiative to this end taken. The Algerian focal point has had similar experience.

Despite difficulties (see below), the project can be said to have broadly achieved most of the specific objectives set out for it. But it definitely did not reach down to the grassroots communities since these are non-existent and potential partner NGOs which could have been relays also virtually do not exist.

For purposes of communications within Tunisia and the region, ENDA-IA called on its 3 500-address computerized files as well as direct contacts, selecting organisations and persons most likely to be interested in the subject. However, outreach and interaction were more successful with officials and researchers than with NGOs. At the end of the project period, a list of resource persons, potential partners for future collaboration, and key actors (mainly at national level) had been established. Other useful regular contacts included the Convention secretariat, the Global Focal Point of RIOD, FAO Forestry Division, and ORSTOM.

During the project period, three meetings were organised in Tunisia. Two were technical workshops, which met with considerable success and enthusiasm: they brought together civil servants, researchers and NGO staff, who do not typically have the occasion of meeting in a neutral and informal forum. The workshops served to create bonds between various actors and the participants at the second one, held in April 1997, decided to hold a third workshop in early 1998, assuming the funding and technical backstopping to organise it. These workshops also enabled ENDA-IA, and other participants, to establish or strengthen links with the scientific and research community.

The third meeting was the April 1996 one to set up the national RIOD structures.

On the other hand, many interesting and useful meetings relevant to the combat against desertification were attended during the three-year period, both in Tunisia and abroad (with separate funding). Such attendance made possible an expansion of the resource-person list, as well as often being a source of documentation.

Lack of funding for international travel meant that during the period, ENDA-IA was not able to be very present at meetings of the INCD and therefore to contribute to the process or to NGO activities directly related to the negotiations.

In terms of public education, the quarterly newsletter, *InfoDésertification*, has fulfilled a very useful rôle. To our knowledge, it is the only publication in the region dealing with the subject of desertification. It has a great potential to be greatly improved in both content and presentation if funding could be found for that purpose. One hundred copies of the first issue were published and this had risen to 500 by issue no. 7. Spontaneous contributions from NGOs and

researchers were beginning to be received in 1997, further demonstrating the interest the publication had evoked.

The project achieved much, mainly through *InfoDésertification*, in terms of circulation of information, both of a policy nature, on NGO activities, useful addresses which can be exploited by readers, and information on international activities. Communication with NGOs throughout the sub-region was also undertaken through the same medium, though in the event it was mainly one-sided.

Another output of the project, produced but still not distributed by August 1997, is a series of 10 fiches on desertification intended for the general public. The intention is for distribution to be handled through a petrol company such as Esso. Unfortunately, no time had been found to negotiate this in the period since the fiches were prepared but it will be done.

Similarly, an article entitled Desertification and You was prepared but had not quite been finalised, or an appropriate newspaper or magazine to print it been found, by the end of the project: this will be followed through later.

Policy analysis, and at the same time more sophisticated public education, were handled through six semi-technical studies prepared by specialists and covering general aspects, sociological aspects, climatic factors, water salinity, desertification of the sea, poverty, and an area-specific study of changes in life-styles.

Field visits were to have played a major part in the project activities but were finally limited and not very useful due to the high staff turnover.

Documentation and bibliography feature strongly among project outputs. The project enabled ENDA-IA to put into much better order the somewhat dispersed documentary base it already possessed, and in particular to expand substantially its material related to desertification, both specifically and in more general terms (land, soil, water, grazing ...). On the other hand, funding was not found to computerize the Centre, which will eventually make it a more useful and easily exploitable instrument for researchers and NGOs. Moreover, many important documents relating to desertification still need to be added to the collection.

In terms of expanding institutional capacity to handle desertification issues, the project was a great success. Unfortunately, the only staff remaining at present who have benefitted from the project from this point of view are the two co-directors whose other duties will make it very difficult for them to exploit their knowledge unless means can be found to recruit an additional and appropriately qualified staff member. Further to staff knowledge and competence, the contact persons and the documentation centre also constitute valuable additions to ENDA-IA's institutional capacity in the area.

In order to maintain the momentum developed by the project, an outline follow-up project has been prepared and is being improved with a view to its presentation to donors, with assistance from a staff member of the Institute for Arid Regions, which may be involved in such a follow-up.

A list of planned activities which were not achieved but are worth being maintained on the "agenda" is presented.

Finally, the constraints on achievement of the project objectives over and above those previously listed (weakness and apparent lack of interest of the NGO community, absence of grassroots community organisations...) are detailed, including in particular staffing problems, but also technical difficulties with Email.

Introduction

In 1993, ENDA Inter-Arabe was approached by Ann Heidenreich of Climate Network Africa with a view to its becoming involved as the partner in Tunisia of an IDRC-funded research project on Combating Desertification.

Established in Tunisia since 1990, ENDA-IA had at the time just decided to concentrate its field work on urban development, essentially in a poor suburb of Tunis. However, its first activity in Tunisia, undertaken between 1991 and 1994, had been an ecology-related project in an internationally recognised national park, Ichkeul, and both its co-directors have backgrounds in agriculture which made them suited to managing a project concerned with desertification. Besides, there is a link with the population of the suburb, Hay Ettadhamen, where ENDA-IA's urban work is developed: it is a product of rural exodus, mainly from the north-west of Tunisia, and at least part of that exodus is due to desertification making small-scale agriculture unviable.

For the above reasons, together with a desire to contribute to encouraging Tunisian NGOs to engage in the combat against desertification, ENDA-IA accepted to be a part of the project. It is important to note that the project document was cut and dried when presented to ENDA-IA, which had no opportunity to give its views or influence the text, objectives, methods or budget. The process was therefore anything but participatory (!) and the project was therefore not adapted to the rather special conditions reigning in Tunisia, as presented later in this report.

The project start-up date was officially 30th October 1993. However, as the funds reached ENDA's account only on 28th March 1994, and as the institution then had limited treasury funds, making it difficult to advance the necessary finance, project activities began in earnest only in April 1994.

The ultimate objective of the project was to "strengthen local communities through the provision of relevant information, so that they in turn can build a sufficient level of awareness and organisation to ensure the national governments, scientific institutions and the international community serve as instruments of the people and be accountable to them".

To achieve this objective, the project would:

- increase policy-analytical and networking capacities of the participating NGOs;
- enable them to play a more effective rôle in providing relevant information;
- link the NGO to the scientific community at national, regional and international level;
- advocate on behalf of local communities in the context of negotiations for the desertification Convention.

The policy analysts were to communicate with "all the NGOs in their countries and... sub-regions" They were to employ participatory methods of research and consultation and share the results of their efforts widely "with NGO networks".

This report is divided into four parts:

1. Situation regarding desertification in Tunisia
2. The NGO Scene in Tunisia
3. Project Implementation
4. Conclusions and Recommendations.

Situation regarding desertification in Tunisia

Agricultural Situation in Tunisia

Tunisia is a small country (16.4 million hectares) situated on the south-western coast of the Mediterranean. Its population is around 9 million and growing at some 2 per cent annually (compared to 3 per cent in 1956).

Total agricultural area is approximately 9 million hectares, of which only 2.9 million are arable. Irrigable land is just 0.6 million hectares, of which half is currently irrigated. Forests cover only 0.63 million hectares (7 per cent of the total land area). A substantial area of the country is rough pasture, desert or mountainous.

Erosion causes considerable topsoil losses: water erosion, especially in the relatively well-watered North, affects 3 million hectares, with estimated annual losses of 5 tonnes per hectare. Wind erosion mainly affects the centre and south. Some 11 000 hectares of arable land are thus lost annually, plus 8 000 hectares of less productive land; urbanisation (towns, roads...) accounts for a further annual loss of 4 000 hectares.

Annual rainfall, which tends to be irregular and intense, varies from around 500 mm in the North to under 100 mm in the South. The country has only one permanent water course - the Medjerda river - which takes its source in neighbouring Algeria which has already built a dam on it. Of all available water resources, half has a salinity of over 1.5 grammes per litre. A World Bank report estimates that early next century, Tunisia will begin to suffer from absolute water shortages in some years.

In other words, Tunisia is faced with a considerable problem of desertification about which the population at large, and especially the urban population, is still barely conscious. The government, on the other hand, is highly conscious of the related looming problems and is spending some \$200 million annually on various measures to fight the phenomenon.

Prior to independence in 1956, colonial legislation already dealt with various aspects of desertification such as erosion control. In 1960, this legislation was adapted and strengthened. Since that time, the following has been achieved:

- 320 000 hectares of forests have been improved and 262 000 hectares planted;

- 433 000 hectares of pasture have been improved;
- 2.5 m. hectares of land have been protected against erosion;
- 30 000 hectares of desertified areas have been rehabilitated;
- 40 000 hectares of mobile sand dunes have been stabilized (100 000 hectares of land thus protected);
- techniques and measures have been introduced to improve irrigation methods and to use brackish water efficiently;
- particular attention has also been given to specific zones at high risk.

Major Causes of Desertification

The causes of desertification are often natural but they are frequently aggravated by actions of Man. Among these causes in Tunisia, particular mention has been made of the following:

- * the increasing rural population and pressures on land and other scarce resources, despite rural exodus and the overall success of the national family planning policy;
- * legislation intended to rationalise land use, which has led to the break-up of traditional ecologically-sound and sustainable land use management and land use patterns;
- * a decline in available pasture land as cultivated areas have expanded to marginal lands;
- * a considerable concurrent rise in the sheep and goat population, boosted by subsidies and other policy measures to encourage meat production;
- * inappropriate cultivation methods (ploughing down slopes, extension of olive and other trees to arid and semi-arid land which leaves the land without protective plant cover, cereal cultivation on pastures in years of good rains ...);
- * a strong expansion in mechanisation (often boosted by remittances from family members living abroad) which allows a single farmer to cultivate up to 40 times as much land as with animal traction which is better adapted to arid conditions, thus denuding and destabilising fragile soils;
- * inappropriate irrigation techniques leading to salinisation; etc.

Institutions Concerned with Desertification

The chief public institution concerned with the combat against desertification at field level is the Ministry of Agriculture, which encompasses general directorates on soil and water, forestry etc. There is sometimes a lack of coordination between services of the ministry and/or between central and regional services.

The Institute for Arid Regions (IRA), based in the South at Medenine, was established 20 years ago and undertakes research on dryland agriculture. Coming under the Secretariat of State for Scientific Research, the Institute has an impressive array of research results and field trials, as well as training programmes, to its credit and is an internationally respected body.

The Ministry of the Environment and Land Management, created in 1991, has the difficult job of finding itself a rôle given that its responsibilities are cross-sectoral and may be seen as conflicting with those of other line ministries. It has developed three environment programmes, known as the three hands: blue, for the sea, green for forestry and yellow for desertification. Among other things, the yellow hand (see below) aims to ensure better coordination between all actors in the area of desertification. The ministry has had some success in public education programmes, including the widespread use of a cartoon-type fennec (desert fox) very popular with children, and various TV spots and longer programmes and debates. It has stressed relations with NGOs.

The "Yellow Hand" Programme, devised by the Environment Ministry, is intended to ensure coordination between the different actors and public education. The programme contains the following elements:

- the physical combat against desertification;
- research;
- training (mainly of civil servants and other public officials);
- drought preparedness;
- adaptation of the legal and institutional framework;
- population control;
- energy.

Coming under the environment ministry are the National Environment Protection Agency (ANPE), created prior to the ministry, which has practical operational responsibilities in areas such as national parks and control of industrial pollution.

Also, the National Office for Water Treatment (Office National de l'Assainissement, ONAS), which handles, *inter alia*, waste water treatment and recycling for irrigation under controlled conditions. Use of waste water (which is treated but not biologically pure) is reserved for fruit trees, cotton, hotel gardens, golf courses and the like. Each year, some 115 - 135 million cubic metres of treated water from the Tunis area, equivalent to a high dam, are made available by ONAS. However, since sufficient and suitable irrigation networks have still not been developed by the Ministry of Agriculture a decade after ONAS began its programme, only a relatively small share of this water is actually used. Thus, in 1996, 26 per cent of "ONAS water" was used for irrigation, the rest being disposed of into the sea. In a country having a very serious medium-term outlook as far as water availability is concerned, this appears as an unfortunate wastage of a resource which is fast becoming scarce.

Mention should also be made of the Agency for Energy Savings (Agence de Maîtrise de l'Energie). Concerned with aspects of energy such as household energy use and improved driving practices to conserve fuel, it has produced some important work with a direct impact on desertification. This is the development of improved wood stoves. These clay stoves, not dissimilar to the Indian tandouri, are fired with wood. Thus, they have constituted a major factor in deforestation of vast areas of the country (each rural family using such stoves is estimated to consume 4.5 tonnes of wood annually just for bread baking). The improvement consists in adding a metal cover which keeps in the heat and allows economies of up to 80 per cent of the wood. It has been fairly widely adopted in

some rural areas where it has been promoted (in some cases by NGOs) and marketed. Its main drawback is the cost of the metal lid (made by local smithies) which at least doubles the cost compared to the simple clay oven. One reason given by the women for adoption in the early stages was not the savings of wood and the toil and time of collecting it, but the fact of having a more modern appliance than the neighbours!

The International Centre on Environmental Technologies, a newly created body, will be setting up a Department on Combatting Desertification. The department will be expected to support efforts by other departments of the centre in applied research on new techniques for combatting desertification. It will also ensure follow-up of the processes whereby natural resources are degraded.

Generally speaking, Tunisia has a well-qualified civil service able to do serious work on desertification. Also, some senior posts are being occupied by a younger generation of civil servants, some of whom are more open to new ideas and approaches than their older-generation predecessors were.

Rôle of Tunisia in the INCD

Tunisia played an active rôle in the negotiation of the INCD which it signed on 14th June 1994 and ratified on 11th October of the same year. In fact, prior to the opening of negotiations, Tunisia had proposed a draft treaty, 39 articles of which were taken account in the text finally negotiated¹.

With its record of support for the Convention, and given the difficulties the country is facing with respect to desertification, Tunisia is endeavouring to give the lead in applying the Convention's principles. In April 1996, a specialised Council of Ministers was held to define the activities to be undertaken in application of the Convention. In order to pursue these broad policy guidelines defined by the government, it has secured the technical and financial support of the German official aid agency, GTZ.

The programme includes four elements:

- Establishment of the National Committee
- Public education
- Drawing up of the National Action Plan
- Establishment of a National Fund on Desertification.

It also includes pilot activities in selected areas of the country.

National Committee on Desertification. The National Committee, a coordinating body, met for the first time, somewhat formally, in April 1997 and its second meeting is scheduled for December 1997. It is composed of 30 members, including all the ministries concerned (agriculture, environment, home office, economic development, finance, higher education, foreign affairs...), research institutions, representatives of farmers, and 8 NGOs selected from all

¹ Tunisia also contributed strongly to drawing up the regional programme on desertification to be implemented by the Maghreb Arab Union (UMA).

regions of the country. It is worth noting that the NGOs with the longest records of field work are not among those eight.

The committee is placed under the Commission on Sustainable Development and is chaired by the minister of the environment.

National Action Plan. A National Action Plan (1991-2000) to combat desertification has been developed by a group of experts working for the Ministry of Agriculture, in sharp contrast to the procedures stipulated in the Convention and adopted in most sub-Saharan countries where complex consultation procedures right down to grassroots level were conducted.

The Plan is based on the principles of an integrated fight, taking due account of economic and social factors. It has several elements including:

- soil and water conservation (reduce soil loss, maintain fertility, maximise use of run-off water, and water conservation, recuperate degraded land in the South, lengthen the life-span of dams by combatting siltation (a typical dam in Tunisia has an estimated life-span of less than 50 years, instead of 100 which could be considered normal), measures to feed the water table, defense against flooding and so on. Main thrusts are dams and protecting grain-producing land in the North.
- forestry (expand the forested area from 7 per cent to 15 per cent during the Plan period (possibly a difficult objective to attain).
- pasture improvement: reseeding, fertilization, protection....
- combatting sand encroachment.
- economic and social factors: continued population control, literacy, rural energy, diversification of rural income generating activities.

In 1997, it was decided to revise the Plan, taking greater account of the methods and approach set out in the Convention and implicating those most closely concerned, including NGOs and "development partners" (donors?). Once a new plan has been developed, a national Round Table will be convened to discuss it, and to seek sources of funding for the actions proposed.

National Fund to Combat Desertification. The government has already presented a request for assistance to UNDP and UNSO, and a three-person team (lawyer, financial specialist and a specialist on desertification) has been working on a study in which various scenarios for managing and utilizing the Fund will be developed. No further information has become available on progress towards the establishment of the Fund.

The NGO Scene in Tunisia

NGOs in Tunisia

It is now recognised by most NGOs themselves, by governments, by international and national development organisations, that in most countries of the Arab region the non-governmental sector remains weak and nascent. Most NGOs lack professionalism (they are mainly manned by volunteers - which is of

course not bad in itself), they lack suitable methodologies, they have only weak fund-raising ability (and often depend essentially on government subsidies), they have little or no field experience.

Moreover, the political context is mainly not conducive to the emergence of strong, contesting, lobbying, innovative civil society, though the situation varies from country to country: it is possibly easier in Lebanon or Palestine or even Algeria than in other countries for NGOs to set up, evolve and operate "normally". A clear illustration of these weaknesses is to be found in the report of the meeting of Middle East NGOs organised at Rabat, Morocco, in March 1996 by the FAO during the preparatory meeting for the November 1996 World Food Summit: it reads exactly like a government document and is in sharp contrast with the equivalent reports from the sub-Saharan African, and Asian, meetings.

In Tunisia, there are between 5 000 and 6 000 registered NGOs and associations. However, many of these may exist merely on paper, or have already ceased activities. In any case, 95 per cent of them operate in the leisure and cultural sectors. For purposes of combatting desertification, there are some one dozen NGOs with (mainly recent) field activities, three or four women's organisations (mainly concerned with women's rights), perhaps 100 environment organisations (mainly performing public education activities and organising seminars) and a few professional associations (sociologists, rural economists, foresters...) with a good potential for collaborating with other NGOs in need of technical backstopping.

Recently, there has been some increase in a few NGOs' field experience (mainly thanks to the GEF small grants programme) but little yet in the area of desertification and virtually none with any true participation of the "beneficiaries". There have been some sporadic efforts to provide training to NGO staff in project preparation, proposed by different donors without any coordination or attempt at complementarity. Often, especially where foreign travel has been involved, the wrong people (president, vice-president...) are nominated. They are the wrong people since their rôle and fonctions in the organisation do not allow them to actually apply the training.

That being said, in general, some slow progress in experience and competence among Tunisian NGOs can be noted (ENDA-IA does not have enough knowledge of those in other countries of the region to make any judgement), and some professionals (geographers, foresters, staff at IRA...) are setting up NGOs with the intention of undertaking field action, or are becoming more involved in NGO field work, which is a welcome development. Some smaller NGOs acting very locally are beginning to operate efficiently. However, the base for selecting partner NGOs in the region remains very narrow. Every effort in Tunisia to establish any type of grouping of NGOs, let alone a national federation, have so far failed miserably.

There are three national-level NGOs with up to 20 years' experience in the field, but all their activities are concentrated in the North-West where desertification problems are relatively less intense than elsewhere. In any event, none is consciously undertaking desertification-combatting action.

Grass-roots community organisations

At local level, traditional forms of community organisation in Tunisia were more or less destroyed by the colonial powers and became virtually extinct under the newly independent government structures.

Thus, there is no basis for undertaking the type of grass-roots participatory action provided for in the Convention or the project objectives. This is a major weakness since most NGOs, apart from their general shortcomings and paucity of field experience, are not emanations of the grass roots but usually constructs of doubtless well-meaning intellectuals, often civil servants.

Further to this, the absence of community-based organisations means that traditional knowledge is dying out fast, with no structures to preserve it or tap it for use by future generations.

Activities of Tunisian NGOs

Prior to the Convention, even those NGOs conducting field activities or undertaking environmental education programmes were not consciously directing them towards combatting desertification. The publicity surrounding the negotiations had some small effect but appears to have brought about no major changes in approach.

A stimulus for NGO field activities has been the GEF Small Grants programme which has been operating in Tunisia for three years (following a study done by ENDA-IA for UNDP, which also covered Egypt and Jordan). Under this programme, some 20 projects had been funded by mid-1997, to the tune of US\$500 000. These have the major advantage of allowing NGOs, most of whose activities have been limited to organising meetings and public education campaigns, to try their hands at field projects on a small scale. Among the projects funded, several might be seen as contributing to the fight against desertification. These include:

- a successful nation-wide public education campaign on desertification run by several NGOs (poster, reproduction and distribution to youth clubs of the environment ministry videos);
- protecting the oasis of Matrouha against sand encroachment;
- protection of the nature park of Touati, near Kairouan in central Tunisia;
- rehabilitation of natural pastures, also near Kairouan;
- planting of wind breaks in the Kef region in the North-West;
- a tree-planting project at Kasserine Laayoune (fire-wood, fodder and soil stabilisation);
- a project aimed at rehabilitating traditional water harvesting works (*jesr*) at Douiret in southern Tunisia;
- rehabilitating the oasis of Chenini/Gabes.

To our knowledge, these are the only current NGO activities in the area of the project, with one or two exceptions, though there may be more about which ENDA-IA is not informed (information circulates slowly, if at all, in Tunisia). Particular mention should be made of the rehabilitation of the badly deteriorated and threatened oasis at Chenini by the Association de Sauvegarde de l'Oasis de

Chenini, using agro-ecological techniques, with particular stress on composting, as well as protection of the oasis from pollution and urban encroachment. The association, created to provide an institutional framework for the pre-negotiated project, is benefitting from advice by an Algerian-born French specialist, Pierre Rebhi.

Involvement of NGOs by government

It is official government policy to encourage and work with NGOs. However, their lack of professionalism and experience means most NGOs have little original to offer as partners of government. Besides, as just mentioned, many NGOs are in fact composed of civil servants who would thus, in a sense, be talking to one another with different hats on. Moreover, as has been mentioned by one concerned person, if a civil servant representing an NGO in a meeting with a ministry is confronted with a person who is his/her hierarchical superior, they will be very constrained in what they can say and how far they can criticise. This situation is reflected in the Ministry of Environment's 1994 Report on Desertification which makes no mention whatsoever of NGOs.

That being said, the government is attempting to involve NGOs in various ways including:

- at
 - public education campaigns, including some directed specifically at NGOs;
 - inclusion of 8 NGOs in the National Committee;
 - organisation by the Ministry of the Environment of a workshop in June 1995 entitled "Partnership for Sustainable Development" to which 50 NGOs were invited, along with others from the public and private sector;
 - organisation in December 1995 of two national days aimed at public education on the application of the Convention and the rôle of NGOs in it.

However, one senior civil servant has expressed in private his scepticism over the ability of NGOs currently operating in Tunisia to contribute much to the public debate or to action at field level.

To complete this rather bleak picture, the Ministry of the Environment itself deplores, in the 1994 *Report on the State of the Environment*, "the evident dearth of specialists on desertification and ... the very few students" devoting their studies to the subject.

The government has been launching various initiatives in the field of participation (round tables, seminars, training sessions...), which is the Achilles heel of Tunisia's programmes to combat desertification, as it is in many other countries. In 1994, a Pilot Programme for Integrated Development in Forestry was launched, aimed at sustainable self-development. Four established national development NGOs are undertaking studies on the participatory aspects of the related projects in order to determine people's motivations and the reasons why they have still not adhered to the objectives.

RIOD

The International NGO Network on Desertification, RIOD by its French acronym, now has been in existence for three years. In many countries, the existence of RIOD has stimulated and strengthened NGO collaboration and activity in the area of desertification. National Committees have been established, along with national RIOD focal points. However, RIOD as a whole has not yet lived up to expectations and its structure and activities are being reviewed by a Swedish consultant whose report and recommandations will be discussed, *inter alia*, at a regional meeting of RIOD at Dakar in early September 1997.

The current structure of RIOD, finalised at a meeting in Ouagadougou in November 1994 following initiatives taken by NGOs during the negotiations, is a Global focal point (currently situated within ELCI at Nairobi), regional focal points for each continent, sub-regional focal points, and national focal points nominated by National Committees on desertification. ENDA-IA accepted nomination as provisional sub-regional focal point for North Africa during the constituent meeting. The support provided by IDRC in the framework of the current project constituted the sole source of funding for ENDA-IA to fulfill its rôle as sub-regional focal point.

In the absence of any specific budget for RIOD activities, and any international travel budget within the IDRC-funded project, efforts to undertake the task of sub-regional focal point were confined to correspondance and occasional telephone contacts.

Thus, in December 1994, immediately following the Ouagadougou meeting, some 150 letters were addressed to NGOs and other institutions in the region, selected from ENDA-IA's mailing files and chosen on the basis of direct knowledge of their activities, where available, and of their name and stated objectives and activities in other cases. Thus, in principle, most of the NGOs had at least a potential interest in becoming involved in desertification work in one form or another. The letters included information on the newly-adopted Convention, the place reserved in it for NGOs, on future meetings, and on means of registering, and the establishment of RIOD. In order to avoid unwanted mailings, a form was included requesting those interested to register their names in order to receive future sendings. Out of some 150 NGOs contacted throughout the sub-region, just 7 (seven) actually replied positively.

Later, on two other occasions, a more limited selection of a dozen NGOs in each of Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Mauritania were contacted, RIOD again explained, and a suggestion made that an initiative be taken to establish national committees. A brochure in French describing RIOD and its objectives was prepared and widely distributed among potentially interested NGOs of the region.

The North African sub-region is composed of five countries: Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Lybia (together constituting the Maghreb Arab Union, UMA) and Egypt. The general weakness of the NGO sector, together with a dearth of field activities, especially in the area of desertification, of networking (be it national or international) or of lobbying, and a general dislike of working together, have meant that developments in establishing RIOD structures have been very slow.

To date, three years after RIOD was launched, only three countries - Mauritania, Algeria and Tunisia - have established national RIOD structures. The first to see the light was in Tunisia, in April 1996, during a meeting convened by ENDA Inter-Arabe. The process and results are described below. The second was in Mauritania, though whether or not the contacts made by ENDA-IA had any direct or indirect influence in this case is not clear. The third was in Algeria in October 1996, following contacts with ENDA-IA.

In Tunisia, following contacts by letter and telephone or direct discussions, and in the absence of any initiative by a strictly Tunisian NGO, ENDA-IA finally called a meeting in April 1996 of Tunisian NGOs potentially interested in the subject. Fifty selected Tunisian NGOs in principle active in the environment, environmental education, rural development and the like were invited to attend. Twenty persons took part and 13 organisations agreed to join the national committee.

At that meeting, there were three candidate organisations² for national focal point, though none was able to mention any practical activity related to the subject of desertification. The three were finally nominated jointly, as a matter of compromise, with a Kairouan-based NGO, Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement et la Nature de Kairouan (APNEK) as lead NGO and the other two providing technical backstopping. Eighteen months later, by June 1997, the only "activity" has been the circulation by APNEK of a file of photocopied documents from INCD 9 several months after the event and without the slightest assessment or comment coming from the NGO about the meeting, NGO activities there, and so forth, as would normally have been expected. Following strong criticism of this absence of activities, a working group was organised during the second technical workshop on desertification (see below) held in April 1997, and a programme of activities for the focal point, designed to activate it, was defined. But this also has made no difference. Furthermore, no work has been done by the three NGOs acting together or any initiative taken to stimulate activities by the "members" of the Committee. In other words, Tunisia has only a *virtual* RIOD committee and focal point.

This uninspiring experience is not confined to Tunisia: AREA-ED, the focal point in neighbouring Algeria, has reported that it has had difficulty drumming up support and enthusiasm. It convened a meeting of Algerian NGOs potentially working in the field of desertification in October 1996, partly using material supplied by ENDA-IA related to the Tunisian meeting. Out of some 40 organisations invited, 12 took part (travel and participation are problematic in Algeria's current political and security condition) and 17 are currently members of the National Committee. AREA-ED has informed ENDA-IA that it also has had difficulty drumming up interest. However, Algeria does already have some activities identifiable as being specifically related to RIOD.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in Morocco, there are several NGO networks dealing with subjects related to desertification - foresters, women, water and others - but there has been no serious interest expressed in setting up a

² Association de Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement de Kairouan (APNEK), with experience mainly in the area of public education and some small field projects, Association Tunisiennes des Sciences du Sol (ATSS), which groups specialists in this area, and Association de Soutien à l'Auto-Développement (ASAD), a fairly recent NGO with field experience in rural areas.

federating network to link work in these separate areas within a desertification-oriented network such as RIOD. As for Egypt, there has been no response to several communications from ENDA-IA sent to some dozen potentially-interested NGOs. Libya is a special case and NGOs there seem to be few and far between.

Acting as sub-regional focal point of RIOD has therefore proved arduous and this experience illustrates the difficulties inherent in mobilising support among NGOs of the region for work on desertification.

Other difficulties for ENDA-IA to act as sub-regional focal point have included the absence of sufficient funding and the fact that the regional focal point (ENDA Third World as it happens) has gone over our heads in organising activities concerning the North Africa region and failed to consult us or inform us of their own initiatives.

All that being said, it is clear that some NGOs have a capacity to make a contribution to the fight against desertification but lack clear ideas of where they can fit in: RIOD structures could, or should, provide guidance in this.

Efforts have been made to obtain funding for a sub-regional meeting of RIOD at Tunis, originally in May 1997 (it would have been organised in connection with a UMA meeting on desertification, finally postponed for lack of funding) and since then re-programmed for September 1997. At the time of writing, only one-third of the necessary funding had been secured, another third being pencilled in, and the final third still pending. It now therefore seems unlikely that the meeting will be held in September either. The project document is included with the documentation. This is perhaps not so serious since, as reported below, it has been difficult to date to rally NGOs in most countries of the region around the RIOD concept anyway. A regional meeting of RIOD members is due to be held early September at Dakar: ENDA-IA will be represented.

In such a context, it has been difficult to develop the activities of a "network" without members and whose potential members have shown so little interest.

Project implementation

Prior to being invited to collaborate in the project, ENDA Inter-Arabe had not been running, or indeed even envisaging, any activities in the area of desertification. Its main relevant abilities were some existing documentation relevant to the subject, its general project experience and its networking capabilities. Also, it had prepared an integrated rural development project in a very poor and desertification-prone region in central Tunisia, near the city of Kairouan. The project area lies within the broad project area of a large IFAD-funded rural development project.

Achievements

The project objectives are summarised in the introduction to this report. As also mentioned, they were not adapted to conditions in Tunisia, reflecting, rather, conditions in many sub-Saharan African countries which still have effective local community organisations and active and experienced NGOs. Therefore, they were not adapted to conditions in North Africa, and especially Tunisia.

Idealistic and doubtless highly desirable, the overall objective of ensuring that the whole national and international community is at the service of local communities is probably over-ambitious in any country. It is especially difficult to achieve in the conditions reigning in Tunisia which include a lack of local community organisations, weak and inexperienced NGOs, and a top-down approach to development despite a declared intention of improving this.

Furthermore, the project was originally to have begun at the start of the negotiations for a Convention. In the event, funding was made available late in the process, reaching ENDA Inter-Arabe in March 1994. This meant that ENDA-IA had no opportunity to influence the negotiations, the more so as there was no international travel budget to allow participation in negotiating sessions. (ENDA-IA was represented fortuitously at the June 1994 session since its co-director happened to be in Paris at the time.)

Finally, advocating "on behalf of local communities" should perhaps have been at least formulated differently insofar as each local community has its own agenda and besides, such communities could not be consulted in order to give a mandate to the five partner organisations as their advocate.

Networking and communication

ENDA-IA has made special efforts to interest Tunisian NGOs in the theme of desertification. For the types of reason evoked above, and a general absence of a culture of collaboration, this has met with little success. Better progress has been made with individual civil servants with a technical background, and persons working with relevant official agencies. This has been achieved through individual contacts and the technical workshops described below. Good relationships have been established with the Institute for Arid Regions, though these are mainly one-sided (they have much more to offer than we do).

A mailing/contact list has been developed from ENDA-IA's 3 500-item computerized "addressothèque". Some 250 potentially-interested institutions or persons, mainly in Tunisia but also in Algeria and Morocco and a few in other Arab countries, have thus been identified.

Documents on the INCD process were distributed and/or held at the disposal of interested persons. In particular, ENDA-IA obtained from the INCD secretariat copies of the Convention in Arabic, French and English and distributed them to individuals and institutions which requested them.

Contacts with Tunisian NGOs

For the reasons explained above, making meaningful contacts with Tunisian NGOs on the subject of desertification has been very difficult, mainly since so few of them are equipped with the budget and staff to consciously undertake any activities aimed at stemming desertification. As a further example of these difficulties, 30 NGOs were invited to the expenses-paid second technical workshop at Kairouan in April 1997 (see below) and only 15 were actually represented, including three from Kairouan itself.

Passive contacts were maintained with many NGO in Tunisia and other North African countries through the sending of publications, especially *Info-Désertification*. More active contacts were entertained with:

- Association pour la Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement de Kairouan
- Association Tunisienne de Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement de Douiret
- Association de Sauvegarde de l'Oasis de Chenini
- Alliance Femme et Environnement
- Association Tunisie Méditerranée pour le Développement Durable
- Association Tunisienne de Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement de Tataouaine
- Assocation for the Protection of Nature and the Environment of Sfax
- Association pour l'Emploi et le Logement (APEL)
- Association pour l'Autodéveloppement(ASAD)
- Association of Forestry Technicians.
- Association des Amis du Parc d'Aïn Dkouk
- Greenpeace Tunisia.

Government

Negotiating capacity with government. As an international NGO, ENDA-IA has no rôle in Tunisia negotiating with the government. Indeed, it has not even been systematically invited to government-sponsored meetings on the subject of desertification, whereas Senegal and Kenya have included ENDA Third World and ELCI respectively in their National Committees). As for Tunisian NGOs, even if a group of competent partner organisations were to be formed, the political context is not conducive to lobbying.

However, a number of key actors in governmental bodies were met and these contacts served the purpose of introducing these civil servants to ENDA in general, and the project in particular. Thus they are now aware of our activity in this field and most of them expressed readiness to collaborate with us.

Meetings attended by ENDA-IA, and those it organised (see below), also served to build up the network of contacts. Among officials concerned the following can be mentioned:

Ministry of Agriculture

- Sadok Bouzid, Director of Soil and Water Protection at the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Mouldi Ben Saïd, who highlighted the stress now being placed by the government on the social aspects of the fight against desertification, following the Rio Earth Summit. Mr Ben Saïd has since transferred to the Environment Ministry.
- Ameur Mokhtar, responsible for desertification, and also a member of the forester's association.
- Jalel Abidi (hunting division).
- Taieb Jalel, director of the forestry products division who has been involved in most of the country's efforts in the fight against desertification. He stressed the importance of overcoming the population's reticence as the grassroots have tended to be marginalized by formal projects: he also warned that achieving participation will be a long process.

Ministry of the Environment

- Zineb Belkhir, responsible for biodiversity
- Adel Bentati, formerly Director of Nature Conservancy
- Abdessalam Kallala, responsible for desertification.

Other official contacts

- Houcine Khatelli, Director of the Institute for Arid Regions, and other scientists from IRA
- Habib Hizem, chief technical advisor to an FAO/GTZ project in Tunisia.
- Arbi Ben Abid, head of the "Green belt" project which aims to counter environmental degradation and has taken on substantial proportions over the past few years, currently extending to all five Maghreb countries,

Other contacts

During the project period, ENDA-IA maintained or strengthened its contacts with:

- the Convention secretariat, though the absence of a foreign travel budget meant that we were unable to attend INCID meetings and thus support RIOD efforts to influence the turn of events.
- the secretariat of the Maghreb Arab Union (UMA) which is stepping up its activities related to desertification; ENDA-IA gained recognition as a partner of UMA in this area.
- the FAO forestry department in relation with desertification activities.
- ORSTOM, the French research institute which has fairly extensive projects concerned with fighting desertification in Tunisia (and elsewhere for other ORSTOM offices), and considerable documentation.

- Baudouine Kamatari, coordinator of the RIOD Global Focal point based at ELCI, Nairobi.
- Mediterranean Water Institute.

Meetings organised

Three formal meetings were organised during the project period:

- two technical workshops (see above)
- the constituent meeting of the Tunisian RIOD National Committee

Technical workshops on desertification.

During the project period, ENDA-IA convened two technical workshops on desertification, as follows:

- The first took place at Tunis in March 1996. Thirty people attended the meeting, mainly from ministries and official agencies, through approximately one-third were members of Tunisian associations (soil sciences, foresters...) including three from established development NGOs with field activities. UNDP, FAO and the French research institution, ORSTOM, also took part. The report of the workshop, and of the press communiqué developed by the participants, are attached.

- The second technical workshop was held at Kairouan in central Tunisia (a region severely threatened by desertification) and was more elaborate than the first, in the light of intervening experience. The workshop was co-sponsored by ENDA-IA, IRA and APNEK, and mainly handled entirely by ENDA-IA with the exception of strictly local arrangements with the hotel (APNEK) and technical conduct of several agenda items (IRA). Grouping a total of 45 participants, including representatives of NGOs, research establishments, ministries, and donors, the meeting was organised under the theme of "collaboration between NGOs and researchers". Its recommendations sought to be highly practical, though it became clear during discussions that there is no more than a very narrow base on the NGO side of the equation on which to built follow-up. Specifically, the workshop defined a series of joint actions distributed between research institutions and NGOs: these consisted of project proposals to be developed and presented as a package to selected donors³. At the time of writing, ENDA-IA was not aware of any action taken to implement this plan. Until, and if, funding for a follow-up project is obtained, unfortunately ENDA-IA has no staff available to stimulate action.

- A third technical workshop is planned to be held at IRA in Medenine during the first quarter of 1998; ENDA-IA's involvement will depend on funding being available to pursue desertification-related activities (see below).

Constituent meeting of the Tunisian National Committee of RIOD

The constituent meeting of the Tunisian National Committee of RIOD, held at Tunis in April 1996, is described above.

³ See appendix

Meetings attended

Attendance at meetings, apart from the intrinsic interest in the subjects and the possibility of gathering documentation, provides important opportunities to introduce ENDA-IA and the project and to meet specialists and expand the circle of resource persons in academic circles, the civil service and NGOs. With regard to content, these meetings often remain theoretical, and attendance is often confined to a relatively small circle of people, so that there is little renewal of ideas.

Though attendance at several potentially very interesting meetings had to be passed due to limited staff availability, a fairly extensive series of meetings on desertification-related subjects were attended during the project period.

Meetings in Tunisia

- *Workshop on Changes in Landscapes and Economic Systems on the Northern Fringe of the Sahara*, Chott Meriem, Tunisia, May 1994
- *World Day on Desertification* (17th June 1995) organised by the Environment Ministry to educate young people on the phenomenon and problems of desertification.
- *Genetic Resources and Sustainable Development*. Tunis, 13 - 14 October 1995.
- *Maghreb Seminar on the Implementation of the Convention*. Tunis, 8 - 11 November 1995. At that meeting, the co-director of ENDA-IA made a presentation at the opening plenary about RIOD and its objectives
- meeting on *Genetic Ressources and Sustainable Development* during which the protection of threatened desert plants was discussed (October 1995).
- Workshop on *Public awareness on the implementation of the Convention*. Kairouan, 1 - 2 December 1995.
- Evaluation workshop on the *Pilot phase of the GEF Small Grants Programme*. Tunis, 15 - 16 December 1995.
- *World Day on Biological Diversity*, 9 - 10 January 1996
- *International workshop on partnerships in the area of implementation of the Convention*. Kairouan, 28 - 30 March 1996.
- *Public Education Day on Agriculture*. Tunis, 16 May 1996, organised by the Tunisian Association of Soil Sciences.
- Workshop on the *Implementation of Pilot Integrated Development Operations*, Gammarth, 3 - 4 July 1996.
- Participation in the regular meetings of the *Selection Committee of the GEF Small Grants Programme*, UNDP, Tunis

Meetings outside Tunisia

- IDRC Dakar Workshop
- IDRC Nakuru Workshop
- RIOD constituent meeting, Burkina Faso, November 1994.
- IFAD/NGO Forum, Rome, 14th and 15th 1995. This annual Forum, had the fight against desertification as its theme in 1995. It involved some 20 NGOs and half a dozen IFAD staff for two days.

- Public meeting to celebrate World Day on Desertification, Italian Senate, Rome, 16th June 1995
- Workshop on environmental communication: strategy and planning for NGOs in the Mediterranean region. Marrakech, 24 - 28 March 1996.
- Conference on Popularisation of the Convention and Implementation of the RIOD Action Plan. Dakar, 29 - 31 May 1996.
- Workshop on the IDRC-funded Research Project on the Convention, Machakos, 25 - 28 August 1996.
- Expert Meeting of UMA on its desertification activities, Rabat, Morocco, 14 - 16 April 1997

INCD Process

ENDA-IA played a small rôle in the INCD process. This began at a meeting convened by UNCTAD:

- INCD process, Geneva, March 1993.
- INCD, Paris, June 1994
- INCD 10, New York, January 1997

Public education

Info Désertification.

This bulletin (in French) was conceived by Abdoulala Bounouh (see below), who produced a no. 0 (not actually distributed). It presents information on questions related to the fight against desertification in both Tunisia and other Maghreb countries, as well as relevant international activities, including in particular the NGO international network, RIOD. It also announces relevant upcoming meetings, highlights results of past meetings, and draws attention to material available in ENDA-IA's Documentation Centre.

It is clear that this 8-page publication, produced at low cost, fills a gap (or perhaps creates a need) in information on the subject of desertification. Feedback has been very positive though civil servants and researchers have shown more interest in the publication than NGOs. The print run expanded from 100 for no. 1 to 500 for issues nos. 6 and 7.

Efforts have been made to obtain input from researchers and NGOs of the region into this bulletin which is unique in the region on the subject. Lately, such contributions have begun to be offered by NGOs and researchers, mainly from Tunisia.

Unfortunately, in early 1997, the Tunisian government cancelled the printed matter postal rate, meaning all mail must be sent at the letter rate, increasing very substantially the cost of distributing publications, be they on desertification or on other subjects dealt with by ENDA Inter-Arabe.

At the time of writing (August 1997), funding to continue this publication, within the context of a modest follow-up project, has still not been secured.

Fiches.

The series of 10 fiches on desertification was prepared, aimed at the general public, which describe in simple terms the desertification process, its impact on people, and the Convention. The idea is to seek a commercial sponsor (for instance a petrol company such as Esso) to distribute these fiches through their outlets country-wise, but this search had not been seriously undertaken by the end of the project period (the texts are included in the documentation). The idea will be pursued and IDRC informed in case of success.

Articles

An article was prepared on the subject: *Desertification and You*. In Tunisia at least, but probably in most countries' urban centres, the public is unaware of the direct impact of desertification on their lives (rural-urban exodus aggravating unemployment and increasing the threat of urban violence, for example), let alone the future threats (fall in food production and concomitant rise in prices...). This will eventually be placed in the Tunisian French and/or Arabic press at an appropriate time.

Further to this as yet unpublished article, the Tunisian press has carried several articles on desertification activities of ENDA-IA.

Brochure

A brochure describing RIOD was produced and distributed.

Finally, various activities organised in the framework of the project definitely contributed to raising public awareness, and especially NGO awareness, of the phenomenon of desertification and of actions which can be taken to contribute to combatting it. They also certainly created or stimulated certain links between actors which otherwise would probably not have been created. It is up to the interested parties to develop and utilise those links.

Policy analysis

Studies

In the framework of the project, it had been decided to produce technical studies on desertification-specific subjects written in an accessible style which are at once informative and educational. These are aimed at the general public, but especially NGOs. In all, six studies were published during the project period, plus one English translation, as follows:

- *La désertification, un péché humain, quels remèdes*, by Ahmed Soussi, probably the most knowledgeable person in Tunisia on the subject of desertification. This study, which provides very clear technical explanations of the phenomenon of desertification in general, as well as highly pertinent considerations on its human dimensions, was translated into English for distribution at the Machakos workshop and for general distribution to English-speaking readers.

- *La désertification en Tunisie, aspects sociologiques* by professor Khalil Zamiti, one of Tunisia's top sociologists. This study examines grassroots reactions to diverse situations where there is no consultation or participation. A mountain region, a forest region and a sea-board site are reviewed.

- *La désertification marine en Méditerranée, un réalité amère*, produced in-house by Bouchra Benmansour and Lassaad Naifer, covers a separate dimension of the subject which is not necessarily always taken into consideration. Several readers have congratulated ENDA-IA for this study.

- *Désertification et Pauvreté*, by Amor Mtimet. This study was contributed spontaneously and reflects the willingness of specialists, not necessarily from NGOs, to collaborate with ENDA-IA on this subject.

- *Comment gérer les eaux salées en Tunisie*, by Emna Zamiti, a doctoral student in biology who is specialised in this subject. The study explains the phenomenon of water salinisation, reviews the situation in Tunisia, where half of the available water resources are at least slightly brackish (over 1.5 grammes per litre), and examines government policies aimed at managing this serious situation.

- *Changes in Living Conditions and their Effect on Arid Environments*, was contributed by Mohamed Talbi of the Institut of Arid Regions at Medenine. The study examines changes in life-styles and land management régimes at the grassroots level in southern Tunisia, brought about by policy decisions or social change. It highlights the devastating effects these changes have had in provoking or aggravating desertification.

- *Le réchauffement climatique et son impact sur la désertification*, by Hamadi Trabelsi, a former director general of Tunisia's meteorological office. The study looks into the phenomenon of climate change and how it is expected to modify rainfall, drought and agricultural production patterns.

These publications, all in French with the exception of the one by Ahmed Souissi paper translated into English, have been distributed by post to selected readers, including in NGOs, and also on the occasion of meetings. They are also available in the Documentation Centre. Reprints of the studies are produced in-house periodically to satisfy demand.

Together with *Infodesertification* (see above), they constitute an important means of informing and sensitizing NGOs and the public on the phenomenon of desertification and its many facets, thereby hopefully stimulating some to engage in the fight which they are not currently doing, at least consciously.

Further to specialist studies, a paper on desertification in Tunisia, and the rôle of NGOs, as well as activities undertaken in the framework of the IDRC-funded project was prepared by E. Ben Hamida and M.P. Cracknell for the Machakos meeting and has since been distributed for information to interested persons.

Field Visits

For the reasons of staffing and others explained above, field visits did not feature prominently in project activities. In all, five field visit were organised. Four were purely observational:

- FAO/UNDP project at Haffouz in the region of Kairouan (central Tunisia), undertaken by Bouchra Benmansour and Lassaad Naifer, neither of whom was familiar with this type of visit or what to look out for. While the population undertake activities related to soil and water conservation on their own land, there seemed to be little effective participation in the sense of true involvement of the project beneficiaries.
- the Association for the Protection of Nature and the Environment of Kairouan (APNEK).
- an APEL-run project at Atatfa (North-western Tunisia).
- an FAO project at Zaghouan with ASAD involvement.

The latter three were indertaken by Ms Megateli who did not produce written reports on them.

The fifth took the form of a mission in February 1996 (as a consultant on gender for the European Commission) by co-director, Essma Ben Hamida, to the oases of Rjim Maatoug and Matrouha in southern Tunisia. Following this mission, contacts were maintained with the inhabitants of this zone where Tunisia's last nomadic tribes have been settled. The mission resulted in an official report and recommendations which are being implmeented by the local authorities with or without EC support.

Moreover, ENDA-IA took the initative of obtaining a promise of support from the Netherlands Embassy (approximately \$8 000) to equip the cultural centre at Rjim Maatoug which was quite empty of all equipment at the time of the visit. In order to manage this equipment and ensure its proper use, a suggestion was made that a group of inhabitants set up an association; in the face of a lack of encouragement for the association by the local authorities, the idea was not pursued and the Embassy redeployed the funds which had been allocated.

In April 1997, the delegation of the European Commission requested ENDA to prepare a project proposal with a view to improving the living conditions, and more especially provide appropriate training in market gardening, for the women of the oasis. At the time of writing, negotiations were under way to recruit the team required to implement this small project.

Documentation and bibliography

Documentation. Prior to the project, ENDA had already established a Documentation Centre, with no outside support, and which paid no particular attention to desertification issues. Thanks to the project, a part-time documentalist was hired who has better organised the centre and laid stress on desertification. However, considerable work remains to be done in order to gather together the extensive documentation on desertification which is dispersed mainly through ministries. Meetings at national and international level

constitute an important source of documentation (papers presented, articles, other publications...).

The Documentation Centre is open to visitors from NGOs, university, the civil service, journalists etc. Due to the absence of funding for the Centre itself, and consequently of permanent staff, opening hours have to be somewhat restrictive.

Prior to the start of the project, ENDA-IA already had a fairly well-supplied specialised Documentation Centre (environment and sustainable development), established through donations, collecting documents at meetings, free subscriptions, contributions of documents and magazines by international and national governmental and non-governmental organisations and so on. However, it had no special section on desertification, nor any particular policy of collecting related documentation.

The documentalist, who started work in mid-1994, put the whole Centre on a rational basis and transformed it into a valuable tool for researchers, beginning with ENDA-IA's own staff. To avoid duplicating work already done, contact was made with the director of the National Agricultural Documentation Centre (CNDA, which is itself networked with other institutions in Tunisia and abroad, including AGRIS-FAO). This contact enabled the documentalist to advance the bibliographical work from that very rich source. It had been hoped to acquire particularly relevant works but the means available did not allow this, except on a limited scale. In particular, it finally proved impossible to gather together the highly-dispersed legislative texts having a bearing on the desertification equation.

This being said, the project allowed ENDA to centralise important information on the subject of desertification and make it readily accessible to all interested persons. Information in general in Tunisia tends to be dispersed and not always easily accessible.

A list of the files, books and other documentation available by the end of the project (June 1997) will be found in appendix. While far from being as exhaustive as had originally been hoped, as mentioned above, this documentation now provides an excellent starting point for anyone wishing to study the question of desertification in general, and its impact in Tunisia in particular. Further to documents specifically dealing with the subject of desertification, other material relevant to the subject is also available in areas such as agriculture, land and water, and livestock.

Digests of larger documents aimed at facilitating consultation, were also produced and some 40 such summaries were produced, admittedly less than should have been achieved.

Further to this, print-outs of some 80 references from the National Agricultural Documentation Centre (CNDA) and 60 from ORSTOM have been obtained.

Photographic documentation has also begun to be collected in the form of slides partly thanks to the Institute of Arid Zones at Medenine as well as other

sources. These slides will constitute the basis for another type of documentation available to researchers.

Documentation was ENDA Inter-Arabe's specific contribution through the IDRC-funded project. In order to make the documentation centre more user-friendly, a start has been made on computerizing it. This is an urgent and time-consuming task for which currently (August 1997) no funding is available. It is ENDA-IA's intention to seek continuing support for the Documentation Centre which contains a rich specialised collection on other subjects as well as desertification, such as women in development, environment, micro-enterprises, credit, as well as training manuals etc. The Minister of Environment and Land Management had indicated a willingness to provide support but the proposed assistance has finally not been forthcoming.

Adding to the existing documentation will remain a permanent concern, especially with regard to documents produced by Tunisians/in Tunisia which are dispersed and often hard to come by.

The computerisation of the Documentation Centre has started on a limited scale, using the ISIS data base. The absence of a computer belonging to the Centre, together with shortage of staff, has meant that this essential exercise is advancing only very slowly (approximately 300 references, among which some on desertification, entered to date).

Institutional capacity

ENDA-IA's capacity to work on and contribute to the debate on combatting desertification has been considerably expanded thanks to the project. Unfortunately, the resignation of the final person working on the project three months early meant that the planned follow-up project (see below) was not written up, and even less presented to potential sources of funding, by the end of the project period. As a result, activities will have to cease at least provisionally until funding has been secured, as noted at various points throughout this report. Similarly, the resignation of Ms Megateli has meant that there is no-one to carry on the work in the interim period, even though ENDA-IA could probably have financed this from other limited sources.

The learning process was rich, especially for the co-director who supervised the whole process. It was doubtless also so for the persons who worked on the project. But institutionally, this learning was lost by the departure of all the persons concerned, apart from the co-director who definitely upgraded his knowledge and this will remain in any future work on the subject; but he simply does not have the time to devote to keeping the project achievements alive on his own (though he will be in a position to train a potential future person working full-time on the subject).

Institutional capacity has also been strengthened by the expansion of the desertification-related address list and relevant personal contacts, in Tunisia and in other countries of the region, as well as the constitution of a group of resource-persons external to ENDA-IA itself, including eminent specialists, on a consultant or voluntary basis. Such contacts will only remain valid if activities can be built up again in the fairly near future.

As mentioned above, the strengthening of the Documentation Centre has also been a major feature of the project's institution-strengthening impact. This tool, at least, will remain to be exploited by students and other users well into the future.

Follow-up Project

An outline document for a follow-up project was prepared early in 1997. For reasons already explained, it had not been finalised by the time of writing, though a senior researcher from IRA has agreed to assist in this, including provision for involvement of IRA in future activities.

The new project would be limited to information (including *InfoDésertification* and further studies in the "Desertification" series), organising one or two technical meetings per year, and lending support for project preparation and search for funding sources to NGOs of the region interested in becoming involved in combatting desertification.

Planned activities which were not achieved

Several activities planned during the project period and announced in various reports sent to IDRC were finally not undertaken. Several of these are certainly still valid and would be included in any future project. These are listed below:

- * a study and analysis of traditional techniques, through a review of university work and field visits, with stress on the technical, agronomic, sociological, economic and other reasons they are being less used, and means of rehabilitating them. In this regard, support for a research project on *ancient know-how* or *les techniques du corps* (that is, the intimate relationships which individuals or groups have developed over the centuries with Nature and which is exploited without the intermediary of any tools - the latter being technology and thus accessible to all) was sought from various sources: Middle East Awards has expressed an interest and discussions continue.
- * visits to selected sites and projects and discussions with farmers about their reactions to current policies.
- * an attractive illustrated (drawings/cartoons) *brochure on the Convention*, expressed in simple terms and directed at the type of civil servant that comes into contact with grassroots actors. The validity of producing simplified versions of the Convention aimed at farmers in their fields is not clearly proven. Such an audience is generally illiterate and anyway farmers are likely to have great difficulty relating to an international legal instrument except in the vaguest way.
- * sub-regional meeting of RIOD.
- * a study on *Forestry and desertification in Tunisia* (or the Maghreb) - a benchmark analysis of Tunisia's policies for fighting desertification and their adequation to the situation at grassroots level.
- * regular Email exchanges with partners in the region with a view to strengthening collaboration with them.
- * linking into selected email conferences on desertification.
- * preparing articles for *Impact* and other appropriate publications (local press, Inter-Press Service, Syfia).

- * Preparing slide presentations on various aspects of desertification in Tunisia for use as educational media among appropriate groups (local communities, schools, environment associations...)
- * contributing to the establishment of local associations, and providing training and support in project preparation and fund-raising, communications, participation and technical assistance.
- * holding information meetings at the University for students on the problem of desertification.

Constraints

Main problems encountered have included the difficulty of locating suitably qualified and motivated young people to work on the subject, weak NGO sector, absence of grassroots organisations, omni-presence of the government throughout the country and in the spaces where NGOs could normally operate, hyper-sensitivity of government institutions towards new ideas and approaches, absence of any funding for travel to meetings, in particular sessions of INCD and RIOD and certain relevant meetings organised in the zone. Staffing and Email, not mentioned in detail in the rest of the report, are explained below.

Staffing

If one aspect of the project was particularly striking, it has been that of staffing. It proved impossible to identify one person having the necessary qualifications and motivation to be responsible for project activities throughout the period. This largely explains the relative difficulty of undertaking all the activities which had been planned.

There are doubtless several explanations for this lack of success:

- when the project began, the Labour Ministry was obliging all prospective employers to channel job offers through its own service. This is how ENDA began its search but the inefficiency of the service was legendary and has now been discontinued. This was a very discouraging experience and meant the search had to be pursued by word of mouth, greatly limiting the range of possible candidates.

- the theme of desertification was very new in Tunisia and both candidates and the early employees found it difficult to identify what was expected of them, even after many explanations and much reading.

- the salary level was thought, originally, to be a problem but in fact lack of appropriate qualifications and the incapacity of young people to latch onto a subject with enthusiasm were more fundamental. It was an issue insofar as suitably qualified civil servants, who may have been able to handle the tasks competently, could only have been tempted away from their jobs, even on long leave for personal reasons, for a far higher salary than was available under the project (they would have given up promotions for the duration of the project). Besides, ENDA considers that civil servants, especially those having several years' experience, cannot easily adapt to NGO ways of thinking and operating. One civil servant who was considered stated that even double his civil service salary (for virtually doing nothing) could not compensate for the intensity of

work which he knew would be required at ENDA! Salary level was also a problem with respect to researchers, who could also have proved good colleagues for the project.

- ENDA Inter-Arabe's staff at the time - basically its two co-directors
- were too busy with other activities to be able to devote the necessary time to discussing with and supporting the staff which *were* recruited. This was a discouragement for them since it meant they were basically working alone and unsupported.

In all, no less than eight persons worked on the project. Two worked throughout:

- The part-time documentalist, **Amara Zaiane**, who works full-time with a government agency and came in on Friday afternoons and Saturdays;
- ENDA-IA's co-director, **Michael Cracknell**, who provided overall surveillance of the project but was unsalaried by the project, except during the final months.

Of the other six, four stayed only for a few months each. These were:

- **Mohsen Kalboussi**, a young biologist whom the co-directors had known as a student for several years. Among the reasons for the choice were his academic qualification, his interest in reading scientific material and in writing (rare among young Tunisians) and his (basic) knowledge of English. After two and a half months, in May 1994, immediately on return from the Kenya IDRC workshop, Kalboussi resigned: his letter of resignation, together with ENDA's reply, were copied at the time to IDRC.

- **Abdoulala Bounouh**, a geographer, began working on the project in October 1994. It had been agreed that he could work from home provided he reported to ENDA's office at least once a week and kept in touch regularly by telephone. In the event, Bounouh turned out to be available only on a very limited basis and the only contact was finally a weekly visit to the office. Bounouh started off well and made a good impression. He read the available documentation to familiarize himself with the subject and conceived and produced a "no. O" of the publication, *InfoDésertification*. which was later adopted as a regular project activity. For reasons known only to him, he suddenly stopped coming after two months and all our efforts to retain him were in vain.

- A third person was then recruited: **Sami Rabah**. He had a suitable profile and was recommended by another NGO, WWF. He stayed for three months, mainly part-time, and completed a certain number of tasks but he resigned, saying that he had been unable to fathom how to handle the tasks and feared he was unable to give satisfaction. This separation took place on good terms, though ENDA was disappointed to lose yet another collaborator on the project.

The result of this series of short-term colleagues (Kalboussi, Bounouh and Rabah) who spent most of their time reading for their own information, was that they produced little actual output useful for achieving the project's objectives

during the first year of operation. Much time was wasted between resignations and recruitments.

- **Nabiha Megateli**, an Algerian national who had spent most of her life in the USA, was recruited to cover the final six months of the project, starting in January 1997. "Discovered" during a GEF meeting at Washington D.C., Megateli appeared to be especially well qualified for the job, with a masters degree in natural resource management, about to engage on her doctoral thesis, highly enthusiastic about ecological matters, having experience working with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the World Resources Institute, speaking English, French and Arabic, and interested to seek her "roots" in North Africa by working in Tunisia. After only three months, Megateli resigned frivolously in March 1997.

Fortunately, two persons did stay on for over a year, allowing us to believe that the project was not entirely jinxed! During the early summer of 1995, following the resignation of Rebah, several candidates had been interviewed and eventually agreement was reached with two doctorate students, despite their speciality being unrelated to desertification⁴. Their professor had strongly recommended them as serious and applied and capable of handling the task required of them.

- **Bouchra Benmansour**, a Moroccan, and **Lassaad Neifar**, a Tunisian, working half time each as a team, started in September 1995 and stayed 13 and 16 months respectively. More time was spent providing them with guidance, and the fact of their working as a team helped them to come to terms with this subject about which, at the outset, they knew little. They proved dynamic and took an interest in their task, making a satisfactory contribution to achieving the objectives of the project. Naturally, a single, more suitable-qualified person working full-time would doubtless have become more deeply involved but such a person was not located.

Some consultants were also called upon for specific tasks, though the Algerian Ben Naoum, a former director of the Centre for Applied Economic Development Research (CREAD), finally, like many of his compatriots, fled his country and was afterwards unable to be located. The Tunisian, Messaoud Meliane, a forester, spent quite some time at ENDA's office providing advice and information, and interacted with Mr Rabah, but he quickly became unavailable after he set up a consultancy company early in 1995.

Moreover, ENDA-IA secured the collaboration of several senior and highly-qualified persons to produce the studies which are now presented as a series (see above). These were:

- **Ahmed Souissi**, formerly with the Ministry of Agriculture and then the Environment Ministry. Souissi, undoubtedly one of Tunisia's chief experts on desertification, wrote the study which described the physical phenomenon of desertification and how it occurs and the rôle of man in that process. Souissi also interacted with Benmansour and Naifer as an (unpaid) adviser.

⁴ working on parasites of fish.

- Professor **Khalil Zamiti**, a leading sociologist in Tunisia, produced the study on the sociological aspects of desertification, based on grassroots experience. He also provided occasional advice, and suggestions on future areas of research.

- Professor **Mohamed Talbi**, a geographer and specialist in geographic information systems and teledetection, who works with the Institute for Arid Regions. He produced a study of Changes in Living Conditions and their Effect on Arid Environments, and will, along with other colleagues from IRA, be an excellent resource person if funding becomes available to pursue desertification activities.

Email

A major handicap in the area of communications has been ENDA-IA's incapacity to get on-line with its Email (and stay on-line!). Although it has an Email address: *endarab@gn.apc.org* and an account with GreenNet in London, it has been constantly dogged by technical problems, meaning it was never really operational, even for sending and receiving messages, let alone accessing conferences, especially on desertification. Internet is not yet easily open to NGOs, including international ones, in Tunisia.

In an effort to overcome these difficulties, and generally to make better use of its material, and train staff, a part-time advisor in computer applications was recruited in May 1997 (using other sources of funding). He has advised that Email be abandoned as such and a connection with Internet be established. Internet has been highly controlled by the Tunisian authorities and by the end of the project period, the connection had still not been authorised.

Miscellaneous

Equipment

Equipment purchased with the project budget was as follows:

- a Macintosh Powerbook 180c computer (all ENDA antennae were equipped with Macintosh at the start of the project period). This proved a invaluable tool not only for work on desertification (it is being used to produce this report), but also for general ENDA-IA activities. While the email was working, it also served for communications purposes.

- Shelving for the Documentation Centre.

- A large-capacity stapler to allow central stapling of *InfoDésertification* and of the 21x15cm studies.

Agreement had been secured from Mr Harmut Krugmann during the Dakar IDRC workshop that a portion (3 000 DT) of the total communications budget could be used as a contribution towards the purchase of a vehicle, for use for field trips in areas of the country where there are no roads. Unfortunately, the additional amount (at least 7 000 DT) needed to actually purchase a vehicle did not become available so that no vehicle was eventually purchased and ENDA-IA still (mid-1997) owns no vehicle. A contributing factor is that, after eight years of

operation in Tunisia, ENDA-IA (like most other international NGOs in the country) still has not been granted a formal agreement of establishment by the Tunisian government which enable it to import a vehicle tax-free.

Visit to IDRC, Cairo

In March 1995, on the occasion of a visit to Egypt in the framework of a Ford Foundation activity, the co-directors of ENDA Inter-Arabe visited IDRC's regional office and discussed the project and the problems faced in actually getting it off the ground.

Finally, ENDA-IA sought and obtained modest funding for representation of NGOs of the region at INCD and other meetings.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, two major factors constituted unexpected brakes on the achievement of project goals: the inadaptation of the project to the conditions in North Africa and especially Tunisia, and staffing. These have been mentioned, along with other constraints, in the above report.

As a result of the constraints, it must be admitted that the project did not reach down to local communities in any sense, either directly or through development or other NGOs. This is the major failing compared to the project's (ambitious) objective.

Similarly, no real networking took place with NGOs in the country and region working on desertification. This, as explained, is due to the dearth of NGOs involved in the subject, and to an absence of a culture of sharing and collaborating which the project was unable to overcome, though it was beginning to achieve this thanks to the Technical Workshops.

Nor, again, did the project really manage to establish meaningful links between government, researchers and the grassroots. Political realities, and the fact that researchers are almost all government employees who interact to some extent with ministries, were major factors here. Once again, the technical workshops were capable of forging or strengthening links at many levels, and were fulfilling a useful rôle, as attested by the interest they generated, at least among ministry officials and researchers.

Finally, advocacy or influencing government policy proved impossible due to an absence of any budget to attend meetings of the INCD and to ENDA-IA's international status in Tunisia which precluded it from meddling in national affairs (with no effective national partner NGOs, this was not possible indirectly either).

Three recommendations will be made should similar multi-country projects were to be implemented in the future:

1. Much better coordination between IDRC offices must be initiated in order to avoid different approaches by different offices (as one example, IDRC Cairo refused use of project funds for international travel while IDRC's West Africa Office approved it for the partner in Ghana). Preferably, there should be a single interlocuteur on the IDRC side for all the partners involved in the project.

2. Regular contacts between the partner organisations should be built into the project and the budget, and made a compulsory part of the activities of each partner. In fact, with the chief exception of the Machakos meeting, there was no structured (or indeed virtually no unstructured) collaboration between ENDA-IA and the other partners (and apparently among the other partners either) throughout the project period, despite efforts on the part of ENDA-IA to provoke them. This is a deplorable aspect of the project which thus became, in effect, five separate projects with no link except for the single source of funding. The rich exchange of experience which could have taken place was almost totally absent. Here again, a single interlocuteur from IDRC would certainly have made for effective coordination and contacts.

3. It is essential for each partner to be able to input into the project document, taking account of local conditions, and there should be flexibility in project implementation in the light of experience. This is equally valid for research activities as for field work.

Tunis, 15th August 1997