



Combating desertification on all levels

Implementing the UNCCD through government advisory services and cooperation management – Experiences from the Integrated Regional Development Programme in the Northeast of Brazil

giz



On behalf of

Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
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Preface: We are losing ground

Fertile soil is the main source of our nutrition. Yet, there is an increasing shortage of fertile arable land and pastures. In many places, water and wind erode the thin layer of soil that enables crop plants to grow. Experts estimate that 12 million hectares of arable land are destroyed worldwide every year, an area the size of the two Brazilian federal states of Pernambuco and Alagoas combined – an almost irretrievable loss, as it can take three hundred years for just one centimetre of soil to regrow. Thus, in the true sense of the word, we are losing ground.

Desertification is mostly caused by humans

Many factors contribute to this process: Deforestation reduces the vegetation cover, salts build up because of poor irrigation practices, overgrazing and unsustainable cultivation

methods lead to erosion. The result is what we call desertification.

Frequently, there are structural reasons for this, like overpopulation, poverty and inappropriate agricultural policies: When diminishing areas of land have to support expanding populations, there is often no alternative but to exploit the soil to the limit. Traditional, familiar methods are no longer sufficient here; in addition, people lack the know-how and the means for necessary investments in better, sustainable technologies.

A convention to combat desertification

In 1996, the international ‘United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification’ (UNCCD) entered into force. Its objective

Desertification and its consequences

Desertification does not only mean the expansion of deserts, but generally the loss of productive agricultural land as well as the destruction of the vegetation cover and the hydrologic balance in dryland regions. The causes include human activity such as inappropriate land management, as well as natural climatic fluctuations and global climate change.

With advancing desertification, biological diversity and the economic productivity of the land are lost, which is not only an ecological, but also an economic disaster: the income losses arising from degradation are estimated at over USD 2.5 billion per year for South America alone. The rural population, most of whom are already poor, are particularly hard hit, which means that those with hardly enough to survive are the ones most affected.

is the preservation of natural resources in the earth's dryland regions through sustainable management. In addition to environmental protection, this includes the economic and social development of the affected areas. Without combating poverty, a substantial cause of desertification, all efforts to preserve the environment will be in vain. Consequently, UNCCD is a convention for the environment and, equally, for development.

Germany's contribution to UNCCD

Not only is Germany one of the 194 states that have ratified the convention, it is also the host country for the UNCCD secretariat. The fight against desertification has been a focus of German development cooperation since the 1980s. Presently, the German government supports over 1,000 projects to combat desertification and support sustainable resource management in dryland regions. It is the aim of many of these projects to improve the institutional framework for the implementation of UNCCD and to integrate the issue in the political structures of the partner countries.

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) supports the partner countries in the imple-

mentation of the convention, namely through its Convention Project to Combat Desertification (CCD project). Examples include the development of concepts and transfer of know-how on combating desertification, the establishment of partnerships and networks, public relations and the implementation of pilot projects.

Since January 2004, the German government has supported the implementation of UNCCD in the Northeast of Brazil within the framework of the Integrated Regional Development Programme, as rapidly expanding desertification threatens the natural resource basis of poor population groups in this dryland region. One of the key areas of this programme focuses on enabling the local partners to get participants and affected groups round the same table so as to develop common strategies for combating desertification. This brochure reports on lessons learned and the successes achieved to date.



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THE CAATINGA
IS SHRINKING

The Caatinga is shrinking

The dry forest is endangered ...

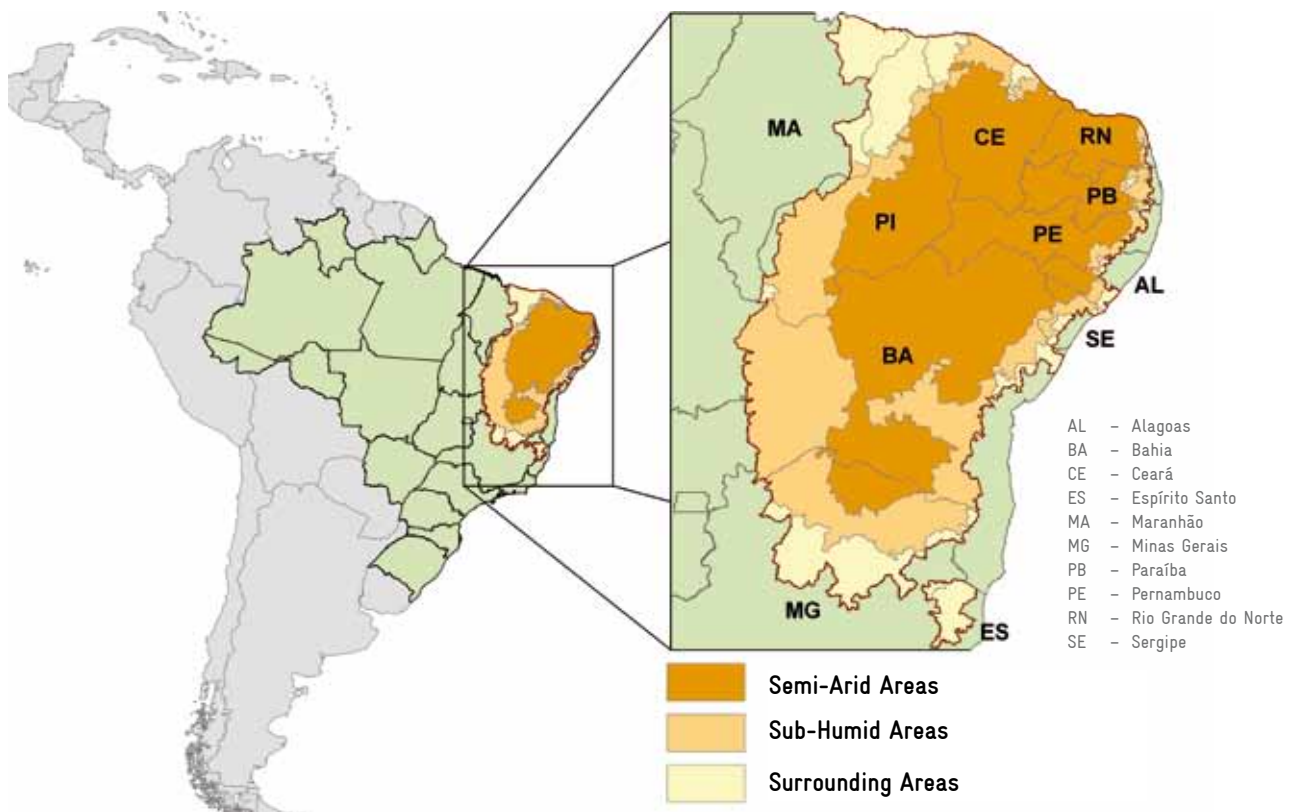
Dryland ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to desertification. This can be clearly seen in the 'Caatinga', the tropical dry forest in Brazil's Northeast. The South American country does not only encompass the Earth's largest, still intact rain forest in the Amazon basin; its Northeast territory has a completely different character. Plagued by droughts, it is considered to be Brazil's 'poorhouse'. An area of more than 1.3 million square kilometres, about three times the size of Germany, is affected by desertification processes. A population of 18 million lives in this area.

The Caatinga is a unique ecosystem with a great variety of species. Nevertheless, it has

already depleted by about one half of its original size, as comparative satellite imagery has shown. Dry woodlands are deforested to create fields and pastures and to gain fuelwood for households, for crafts enterprises, and for the production of wood charcoal for the ceramic and gypsum industries.

... with dramatic consequences

Brazil's Northeast is the dryland area with the highest population density worldwide. This leads to over exploitation of natural resources. Once deforested, the areas are often overgrazed, or used for coffee or cotton monocultures – plants of only limited suitability for the fragile ecosystem. Another



problem is created by irrigation systems without drainage leading to accumulating salinity of the soil. All these factors contribute to the further destruction of the soil, the vegetation and the natural water balance.

State promotion programmes even reinforce this process to some extent, as irrigation projects lacking appropriate drainage are still funded and loans are still granted for the planting of coffee and cotton monocultures and for industrial enterprises whose energy consumption is harmful to the environment.

In Brazil's Northeast, about 70 per cent of cultivable land belongs to large-scale land owners. As soil fertility is decreasing continuously and it is not possible to bring any virgin land under cultivation, the only option left for small farmer families is subsistence farming – with meagre returns that scarcely yield the bare necessities of life. Alternatively, they migrate to the slums in the outskirts of the bigger cities.

A programme for the Northeast

One of the objectives of the Integrated Regional Development Programme – Germany's contribution to UNCCD implementation in Northeast Brazil – is to adapt state support more effectively to the social and ecological requirements of the dryland region. For this, the most important cooperation partners are the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment, MMA (Ministério do Meio Ambiente), ASA (Articulação no Semi-Árido), a network of more than 700 NGOs, and the governments of the federal states affected by desertification.

Under the programme, Germany advises Brazil on the formulation and implementation of its National Ac-

tion Programme to combat desertification. Also, the federal states of Brazil's Northeast receive support for their own action programmes which they have been working on since 2008. They are expected to put the implementation of the national programme into practice in the regions and to provide a targeted response to special local conditions.

The task: training of cooperation management

The successful implementation of these action programmes depends largely on the know-how and skills of the responsible persons in the Ministry of the



Environment, the NGOs and the federal state governments. Are they capable of assessing the consequences of their political action for the environment? Will they succeed in establishing a fruitful dialogue among the different interest groups and institutions? Or, put differently, are they able to manage the cooperation of all participants? And, will they succeed in introducing concrete measures against desertification eventually? German development cooperation focuses on communicating the know-how and skills needed here by means of policy advice, process support and training, particularly in cooperation management, and the support and monitoring of exemplary measures of sustainable land management.

Inauguration of a cistern as a drinking water source.





THE DIFFICULT PATH
TO A COMMON PLAN

The difficult path to a common plan

Action programmes – common action instead of just words

Technical solutions and the treatment of symptoms do not suffice to slow down land degradation and desertification. Rather, structural causes must be approached, for example poverty, unsustainable agricultural policies, or population growth.

This is also the objective of the national and regional action programmes to combat desertification. The UNCCD requires all ratifying countries to establish such action plans as a central element of their implementation. They should provide an institutional basis for the fight against desertification, take the social, economical and political cause-and-effect relationships into consideration and, at the same time, facilitate the involvement of the population. The fight against desertification would be futile and unsustainable without the participation of the people affected.

A common plan for the country ...

A National Action Programme (Programa de Ação Nacional de Combate à Desertificação e Mitigação dos Efeitos da Seca – PAN) for Brazil was formulated already in 2004 under the aegis of the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment and in cooperation with farmers' unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government officials, politicians and interested population groups from the eleven federal states of Brazil's Northeast. Here, German development cooperation pro-

vided active support. Combating poverty and inequality, expanding farmers' production capacities, designating areas of conservation and establishing the necessary institutions: with these objectives, PAN is to have an impact on politics – not only on environmental issues, but also on policies in the economic, agricultural and energy sectors, which also play their part, e. g. when large-scale deforestation takes place to quench certain industries' thirst for energy.

In fact, ministries and authorities have since used the action programme as a frame of reference for a more sustainable use of natural resources. For example, the Ministry of Integration has made its own contribution to PAN, and the Ministry of Education has given greater scope to desertification and how to fight it at schools and in teacher training.

... individual programmes for the regions

The National Action Programme mainly provides cross-cutting strategic guidelines, e. g. for the strengthening of smallholder farming and greater sustainability in agriculture, trade and industry. In contrast, in view of the large size of the areas affected by desertification, the management of operative planning only works on a regional level, meaning the eleven federal states involved. For this reason, individual action programmes to combat desertification and the consequences of droughts were planned in the federal states

from the start (Programas de Ação Estadual de Combate à Desertificação e Mitigação dos Efeitos da Seca, or PAE in short). This regionalisation also enables the local population to collaborate, and it takes Brazil's federal structure into account. What is more, regional programmes can be adjusted more effectively to local particularities, for example to the high proportion of dryland regions in some federal states, or the enormous demand of wood charcoal by the ceramic and gypsum industries in other regions.

German development cooperation supported the preparation of the PAEs, for example by conducting training measures, providing policy advice and process support and implementing pilot projects in the eleven federal states. Activities focus on the three federal states of Ceará, Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Norte, where the participative preparation of the action programmes was monitored most intensively until the end of 2010.

Networking and integration – combating desertification on all levels

Ultimately, sustainable land management and combating desertification are intended to improve people's living conditions – this is the objective targeted by German development cooperation, along with its partners in Brazil's Northeast. But to achieve this, the issue of desertification first has to be placed on the political agenda, along with the contents and strategies of UNCCD. This is

what experts call 'mainstreaming' (for more information see chapter 4).

Furthermore, participants and stakeholders must be coordinated and involved in discussions as there are numerous sectors responsible for a more sustainable land management: environmental and resource protection, agriculture and livestock, environmental education, the fight against poverty, food security and promotion of the labour market or forestry, to name just a few. All of them need to be integrated in the action programmes. This is not always easy when discussion partners are from fundamentally different institutional 'cultures' with objectives and interests that do not always coincide. Yet it is only in cooperation that realistic, effective action programmes can be formulated and sustainable results achieved.

Preliminary phase: confidence-building by local projects

Up to now, in Brazil's Northeast the public administration and civil society, which is well organised, have tended to view each other critically because of the great differences in their working styles and philosophies. For example, civil society actors have repeatedly called the action programmes 'bureaucratic monsters' which mainly serve political justification and are in any case unlikely to be implemented at all. The Ministry of the Environment, for its part, often approached NGOs with scepticism.

Therefore it was important to build confidence as a first step, preferably through common, very specific local projects. For this reason, German development cooperation promoted local initiatives where administration and NGOs collaborated in combating desertification, with the Ministry of the Environment and the NGO network ASA as partners. The projects were selected in a competition and supported by a specially established fund called 'DesertFund'.

With this DesertFund, 44 small projects were already funded before the completion of the first action programmes. Some of them worked to stop deforestation and restore degraded areas, while others trained farmers in methods of sustainable land management and combating desertification. Further projects provided people in rural areas with income

alternatives to deforestation, e. g. beekeeping, encouraged the efficient use of fuelwood, or promoted environmental education in rural areas, the integration of the fight against desertification in local planning, or the dissemination of best practices. What is more, the Fund has achieved yet another objective: Today, the Ministry of the Environment and NGOs respect each other and some NGOs have contributed actively to the drafting of action programmes in federal states.

Success: The funding model gains its own momentum

The experiences gained in the projects are also beneficial for others as the local project partners have disseminated them in local gatherings, meetings of participants and

The diet of goats is improved by silage; dryland region in Ouricuri Pernambuco.





Tree nursery with indigenous plants for reafforestation of the Caatinga.

The landless of Loreto have founded a tree nursery

The community of Loreto is located in the south of the federal state of Maranhão. The landscape here is characterised by the ‘Cerrado’, a semiarid savannah. The area has a vast potential for agro-extractivism, meaning the collecting of wild plants. Instead, types of use which overburden nutrient-poor soils prevail: intensive and extensive cultivation of soy-beans, sugar cane, cotton and maize. This leads to extreme degradation that is intensified even further by the regular use of agricultural chemicals, deforestation, charcoal burning and to some extent the land management of small farmers.

The trade union of the landless has developed an alternative, a socio-economically and ecologically sustainable development model based on solidarity and focusing on the traditional collection and processing of wild fruits and berries from the Cerrado. The idea behind is that a tree nursery will produce 10,000 seed-

lings of all those indigenous plants suitable for agro-extractivism, which later will be planted into their wild habitat.

This project was promoted by DesertFund. As a first step, the union of the landless informed and trained interested landless families from the region. Then the future managers collected the ‘seed capital’, 45,000 seeds and seedlings from the Cerrado. The varieties were catalogued with their biological characteristics and instructions for their propagation. The tree nursery was created by the landless themselves during 19 locally organised operations.

Funding by DesertFund has now expired, but the landless will continue to expand their tree nursery. They are planning to produce more seedlings and to organise premises for the education and training of small farmers. In cooperation with other organisations, they are also planning to establish more tree nurseries and disseminate their experiences.

publications. In this way, word has spread about the successes of DesertFund. As a consequence, some federal states have adopted the concept and already launched their own funds for local projects.

Yet, the projects have not only created confidence among the participants. They have also generated an increasing demand for measures to combat desertification, as a representative of the trade union of landless labourers in Loreto in the federal state of Maranhão reports: *'After conclusion of the project, the demand for new fences for headwater regions increased. After all, we have identified more than 180 water springs in the community, most of them without any fencing or protection.'*

When awareness of the problem is still lacking ...

To start with, the population must be made aware of the threat posed by desertification, as is shown by experiences made in the projects of DesertFunds. Evidently, people lack awareness of the extent to which their own soil is already affected. This is an experience shared by the Association of Rural Teachers during environmental education taught in Dormentes in the federal state of Pernambuco, as a teacher confirms: *'During the meetings in the villages it became apparent to us again and again how perplexed people were when we showed them photos of their own environment where desertification had already become visible. We conclude from this that*

the very first step should be awareness-raising before activities to combat desertification are started.'

Another success: participants gain confidence

The idea of building bridges of trust with successful small-scale projects has worked. When their achievements are acknowledged, partners from civil society and administration become involved even more closely. In Ceará for example, the NGO 'Comunicação e Cultura' contributed to the strategies of the PAE on environmental education with its experiences. Together with pupils, Comunicação e Cultura has created school magazines on combating desertification where the pupils publish reports on climate change, degradation and possible measures in the villages, thus functioning as multipliers for awareness-raising. Another example

Environmental education in Bahia.





Youths during a radio transmission on the topic of desertification.

of successful awareness-raising by environmental education can be found later in this brochure. These examples illustrate that the action programmes do not impose complete action patterns on people but combine many individual initiatives and activities of the participating parties.

Consequently, the next step of the action programmes, the diagnosis phase, is also concerned with familiarising authorities, NGOs and local initiatives with each other's different activities. For this purpose they were given much space to present their initiatives, experiences and successes, which strengthened the feeling of ownership and confidence. Praise motivates.

Diagnosis phase: What comes first?

What should be given priority? Should laws on forest utilisation be introduced first, or should the promotion of concrete projects of sustainable forestry be given preference? What will slow down desertification more effectively, support in generating alternative income or educating and training farmers in water and land management? Of course it would make sense to tackle all these problems at the same time. But how can this be done if, in practice, the available resources are not sufficient? For this reason, mainly criteria which facilitate the prioritisation of fields of action and areas of intervention were defined in the diagnosis phase.

Methods of systemic analysis are helpful for such prioritisation, meaning here that the different causal chains of desertification and their interactions are analyzed and evaluated.

An interesting side-effect could be observed here, as the analysis showed that participants approached the issues with fundamentally different evaluation criteria: for some of them, nutrition and the income of poor population groups is of particular importance as, if necessary, people will justify degradation and exploitation of resources with these problems. Others will give preference to the protection of resources and the environment, for example when dealing with the problem of deforestation of the Caatinga. Systemic analysis offers the chance to address the vari-

ous measures and priorities and to agree on the most objective criteria possible.

'To-do list' instead of 'wish list'

In preparation for the action programmes, community workshops were held in the three federal states. In these workshops, the results of the systemic analysis and the consequences of possible future scenarios were compared with the perspectives of the people affected.

It was planned that, at the same time, a 'genuine participatory process' should be initiated. What does this mean? Often it happens in such workshops that long lists of desirable activities are drawn up, generating excessive expectations that will result in frustration, as control mechanisms and sanctions in case of non-fulfilment are lacking. People tend to forget that there is more to participation than voicing one's interests and wishes, namely making active contributions to programmes. The idea is therefore to implement a to-do list but not to formulate a wish list.

Planning phase or the difficulty of asserting priorities

By means of systemic analysis, fields of action, areas of intervention and activities with short-term or long-term effects were prioritised. Areas of intervention were selected considering not only where people are worst affected by desertification, but also the potential of

implementing the action programme or, put differently, where most can be achieved with limited means. In this context, the degree to which people are organised, material and financial resources, the support given by the communities and many other factors are decisive.

As was to be expected, such a ranking list is sometimes painful for the participants as not only individual fields of action, but also entire population groups may be given lower priority or even be disregarded. Yet, consistent packages of actions were set up in the three federal states in the course of 2010.

For example, the action programme for the federal state of Ceará includes an 'action pact' with clearly defined obligations, containing four programme areas:

- 1) the promotion of sustainable production and resource management;
- 2) adaptation to climate change in semiarid regions;
- 3) strengthening of civic empowerment; and
- 4) improvement of public administration directed towards a cooperative environmental management.

At the same time, the action programme of Ceará focuses initially on three regions where desertification has expanded vastly, namely the 'Sertão dos Inhamuns', the 'Sertão de Irauçuba' and the 'Sertão do Médio Jaguaribe' ('Sertão' is the term used for the semiarid landscapes of the landlocked region of Brazil).

Action programmes of the federal states: an orientation towards partnership and action pacts

Ceará – In this state it is planned to establish demonstration units for sustainable technologies for soil protection and water management. Cooperation partners are the programme 'Mata Branca' and the union of NGOs, ASA, from the civil sector, furthermore the agricultural counselling centre EMATERCE and several research facilities, among them the national research institute EMBRAPA and universities of the federal states.

Pernambuco – In the PAE of this federal state, regulation of the land law is considered to be a condition of sustainable land management in the Caatinga. Therefore, one of the focal areas of the action programme is improving the qualifications of the local staff of INCRA and FUNTEPE, the agencies for land reform. Moreover, it is planned to

improve the coordination of these institutions and FUNAI, the governmental protection agency for the indigenous population, also with creditors and ATER, agricultural consultants.

Rio Grande do Norte – Federal authorities and communities should improve their cooperation in the fight against desertification: this is one of the objectives of the PAE in Rio Grande do Norte. For this purpose, it is planned to increase the number of so-called 'Promotorias do Meio Ambiente' in the communities themselves and to qualify their staff in combating desertification and sustainable land management. Cooperation partners in this measure are the Federal Ministry of the Environment, the cooperation authority of the municipal environmental agents, and the environmental authority.

Communities join in preparing action programmes

In the meantime, the federal action programmes have become popular with communities as a result of the positive experiences. The community of Irauçuba in Ceará has prepared the first local action programme in Brazil (Programa Municipal de Combate à Desertificação, PAM), and the local council has already given its consent. This model has created a precedent: more and more communities show their interest, from Salgueiro in Pernambuco to Carnaúba dos Dantas in the federal state of Rio Grande do Norte.

Lessons learned: results are more important than documents

- When preparing UNCCD action programmes, strategic partnerships and implementation pacts are more decisive than planning documents (though the latter are undoubtedly important, too). This also means that a rigid sequence of diagnosis, planning, implementation and monitoring need not necessarily be adhered to if concrete windows of opportunity are open. Results are always more important than documents.

- Partners' different 'institutional cultures' must be taken into account when preparing an action programme, not only concerning public administration and civil society, but also the private sector as it is a central stakeholder in the fight against desertification.
- The UN convention on combating desertification (UNCCD) takes a holistic approach to an even greater extent than the other two large environmental conventions (the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change). This means that many actors need to be involved, most of whom have already worked out concepts and strategies of their own and are usually bound to their own agendas for action and indicators of success. To avoid triggering a defence reflex against the action programme, the focal points need to treat these partners' activities and successes with respect and appreciation and embed them in an integral strategy to combat desertification.
- Agreements within action programmes should be as specific as possible, and linked to monitoring and sanctions. Participation means having the right to voice one's opinion, but also the obligation to cooperate. Consequently, it makes more sense to formulate action programmes with selected, completely negotiated implementation projects from the start than to postpone their operationalisation to the future.

Statements of our partners

'We in Ceará have received much support from our German partners with the preparation of the action programme to combat desertification. They have advised us with the development of appropriate methods and the prioritisation of activity areas and

assisted us in the decentralisation of actions and in getting very different actors round the same table.'

Liduína Carvalho,
Focal Point of the Federal
Government in the State Ceará



03



FOCAL POINTS: FROM
CONTACT PARTNER
TO COOPERATION
MANAGER

Focal points: from contact partner to cooperation manager

There's no way forward without partnership ...

Desertification is caused by a wide range of factors and protagonists – poverty, poor political decisions, ignorance, population growth, profit-seeking, climate change. Consequently, combating desertification is heavily dependent on the willingness and ability of those involved to act concertedly – local individuals and governments, authorities and companies, parliaments and NGOs. It is no coincidence that the UNCCD stipulates 'partnership' as a binding principle.

... but it cannot be imposed

But in practice there are a lot of reservations – especially for those who have not yet experienced the benefits. Initially it always seems easier to stick to one's own role models and methods than to change them in favour of better cooperation. What is more, many organisations have fixed target and success indicators which cannot be altered on an ad hoc basis. And finally, cooperation simply costs time – and therefore money.

Experience shows that partnership cannot be decreed from above. However, it can be promoted and developed – and this is precisely one of the goals of the integrated regional development programme for North-eastern Brazil. The idea is that partnership is not simply a matter of holding workshops and meetings. All participating groups and institutions are to be involved in the initial

analysis and planning, as well as taking on responsibility when the action programmes are implemented. The process of establishing partnerships has already been initiated by means of locally organised workshops to prepare the action programmes (see previous chapter).

'Focal points' – mediators in the federal states

The UNCCD defines so-called 'focal points' – contact partners who are at the heart of the partnership concept. In Brazil there is not just one focal point in the government (the Secretary of State of the Ministry of the Environment), but several – not least due to the sheer size of the country. These individuals represent the interests of various social groups and states. In each of the eleven states involved there is one focal point for the government, one for civil society and one for the parliament. In several states there is also a focal point representing research.

Their job is by no means to impose their own action agenda on their partners. Their primary responsibility is to raise awareness among their own interest group, mobilise members and improve coordination between all those involved. After all, action programmes are supposed to pick up existing individual initiatives, link these to form a shared approach to combating desertification and supplement any pieces of the jigsaw puzzle still missing to form an effective strategy.

Qualifying as a 'cooperation manager'

However, the locally based focal points frequently lack the networking capacity and the political and institutional backing to be able to perform their tasks. This is where the programme came into effect: the status of the focal points within their respective institutional setting was to be enhanced so that they may improve interaction between states.

For this reason, the focal points were given consultation while the action programmes were being developed, as well as being trained intensively in cooperation management over a period of one year. First of all, workshops were held to set out the requirement profiles and functions of the focal points. The next topic was management of the action programmes and the third module focused on the implementation of the desertification agenda at the institutional level and the communication strategies required for this purpose.

The focal points were also provided with support in improving contacts with decision-makers and intensifying contacts between states. For this purpose, practice phases were held in which the focal points were given 'homework', which they were required to implement in their states and within their institutional setting, supported by coaches. This enabled them to transfer what they had learned to their institutions. And finally, the training sessions also sought to promote

more coherent action by the focal points from administration, politics and civil society among themselves.

Each training workshop was held in a different state – in Rio Grande do Norte, in Espírito Santo, in Paraíba and in Pernambuco. This gave the focal points the opportunity to meet decision-makers, ministers, parliamentarians and NGO representatives from other states.

Requirement profiles – what is the role of the focal points?

This was an especially important issue, since up to now there had been barely any consideration of the specific requirements, role and functions of the focal points and these had been interpreted very differently by political, administrative and social bodies. The consensus was that focal points were to have sound specialist knowledge of desertification. But what functions are they required to perform?

Discussions among focal points led to the compilation of an initial requirement profile: focal points are to manage the institutional compromises required to create a joint strategy to combat desertification. They are to settle conflicts and differences of opinion as well as support the conception, implementation, institutionalisation and financing of the action programmes. They are also to be involved in shaping the accompanying legislation and mediate between the state and social groups.

All this requires special skills in communication, conducting negotiations and resolving conflicts. Last but not least, political and institutional backing are required, too.

Establishing the focal points within their institutional setting

The next stage focused on support. Backed and advised by coaches from the programme for regional development, the focal points established local contacts with the key protagonists in their state. For example, they met with decision-makers from the ministries of agriculture, education and energy and with representatives of civil society. What expectations of the focal points do the latter have, and how do they see the focal point's role? These issues were also addressed, as well as the conflicts facing institutions themselves and which the focal points would have to confront – from poorly defined responsibilities to a lack of financial resources. An important side effect of these talks was that those involved gained a better understanding of the tasks and functions of 'their' focal points and developed a willingness to engage in collaboration based on trust.

Opening structures

Most administrative authorities in the state had no previous experience of effectively developing and implementing a PAE based on participation and partnership. This is because authorities are very rarely geared towards this

type of citizen involvement. So how can institutional structures be opened up for participation? This was where the focal points provided 'development aid': their training gave them the opportunity to analyse the organisation of cooperative ventures in the environmental field, based on concrete examples from Brazil. From this they developed specific proposals for their own state – ranging from concepts for a management unit to combat desertification through to setting out objectives and mandates for a round table. These drafts were then refined in discussion with the decision-makers and partners in the states.

These drafts have now been adopted as part of the action programmes in about half of the federal states involved – in some cases they even form part of legislation.

Trust is all well and good – but monitoring is a necessity

But how can those involved be sure that everything is actually being carried out as agreed? An important instrument here is that of monitoring. There are two questions to be answered:

- Are we still following the path as planned (process monitoring)?
- Is what we planned having the desired effect (effect monitoring)?

However, the participatory approach of the action programmes makes particular



Happy child with the 'harvest' from the family garden, facilitated by water from the cistern.

demands of a monitoring system. On the one hand, processes have to be as efficient as possible; on the other, it is also important to promote partnership-based control and with it the idea of ownership. If possible, it is better to define in advance who takes part in which phase of the monitoring. Who will be involved in formulating indicators or collecting and analysing data? Who will formulate conclusions? The focal points developed drafts on these issues which were discussed in the states. The result was a monitoring concept which feeds into the state action programmes.

We keep in touch – that's cooperative knowledge management:

The training programme resulted in a lively exchange between focal points from all groups and regions. They exchange information and concepts, meet for technical discus-

sions and communicate via a blog. The latter also serves as a virtual library for the whole subject of combating desertification and is used extensively: it was accessed over 15,000 times between 2009 and 2010.

Lessons learned: cooperation is a matter of learning by doing

- Many institutions and programmes have committed to promoting cooperation. But in practice there is less cooperation than everyone would like. And this inconsistency is hardly ever addressed in an open debate. Clearly, the most powerful resistance is that which is not articulated. Experience from the project shows that both the benefits and drawbacks of cooperation should be openly addressed. This is the only way to shift the weight more to the plus side. The most important disadvantages of cooperation are the costs (time, personnel and material) and the fact that it is sometimes necessary to compromise. This is strenuous, can put the brakes on a person's career and cost a lot of effort in terms of the everyday operations of one's own institution. For this reason, cooperation cannot be imposed, but only extended through practical experience. Development collaboration is able to offer the appropriate forums and instruments.
- Since cooperation cannot be decreed but only extended through practice, the method of setting practical tasks as an

element of training within the 'Integrated Regional Development Programme' has proved effective. Applying what one has learned within the reality of one's own institution is a first step towards management of change.

- When it comes to partnership-based cooperation, personal aspects are just as important as elaborate institutional set-ups. Agreements and cooperation is often pushed forward by committed leadership personalities. If these individuals are missing, even sophisticated institutional structures will fail to work properly. So institutionalisation is an important factor for sustainability, but it is not the only
- one. For this reason, personal aspects should be deliberately integrated in the support strategy, either through regular meetings or by means of proactive communication and the promotion of leadership personalities.
- Work with focal points has shown that the instruments of knowledge management which work best are those which allow an exchange of information and experience, i. e. cost little, require limited administrative effort and can easily be used by a wide group. Examples are open blogs, simple e-mail groups and informal discussions held during training events.

Statements of our partners

'The cooperation management training programme definitely improved our contacts with protagonists in the national and state governments, parliaments and civil society. Other important points for me were the exchange of information and the opportunity to learn communication techniques as well as formulate jointly supported strategies to combat desertification and promote the sustainable development of the Northeast.'

Paulo Pedro de Carvalho,
national civil society focal point
and representative of the NGO Caatinga
in the state of Pernambuco:

'The focal points training programme was a major factor in the joint development of the action programmes. It became clear that it was in the interests of all those involved to make inter-institutional cooperation define the entire process of creating and implementing the action programme. Since the action programmes are designed to be interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral, partners have to communicate all the time. The focal points learned to win over strategic partners for this joint cause and get them to commit to a common goal, set priorities and agree on success indicators.'

Raquel Cristina Batista Vieira Pontes,
head consultant in creating the action
programme in Ceará



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MAINSTREAMING:
THE ROAD TO
THE INSTITUTIONS

Mainstreaming: the road to the institutions

The starting point is far from ideal

A key goal of German-Brazilian development cooperation is to put the UNCCD issues and the fight against desertification on the political and social agenda on a long-term basis. The experts call this 'mainstreaming' – embedding key issues in both breadth and depth, institutionally and socially, in government, legislature and civil society. The aim of mainstreaming is to get resources allocated to implementation, gain political prestige for the topic, ensure that issues are incorporated in laws and, regulations and not least encourage broad-based support or even demand for the agenda in society at large.

The existing situation in the Northeast was far from ideal for such mainstreaming. Previously, administrative and planning authorities had not attached much importance to desertification since they barely saw any economic potential in rural dryland areas. Combating degradation costs money but does not promise economic returns in the short term. As a result, there is scant financial incentive to protect land resources, unlike the CO₂ certificates of the Climate Convention.

Starting on a small scale with pilot projects

Given this background, what is feasible in terms of mainstreaming? Where is the best place to start? Firstly by means of pilot projects which provide models for tackling climate change and desertification: In the Northeast of Brazil, support is provided for projects being run by local partners, for example sustainable forestry, alternative sources of income so as to relieve the pressure on natural resources, sustainable water and soil management as well as environmental education. These projects seek to promote mainstreaming on a small scale by bringing together various protagonists while also influencing to some extent the political agenda.

Exchange visit of a group of youths to gather knowledge about a sustainable system of agroforestry.



Environmental education: a pilot project geared towards mainstreaming

Raising awareness of sustainable development within regions under the threat of desertification among future generations is among the goals of rural environmental education. Many of the projects proposed for DesertFund came from this area. In addition to training programmes for teachers and teacher trainers, they also included excursions to the Caatinga to generate enthusiasm among school children for the beauty and rich biodiversity of the region. They also learned about sustainable forms of production and created school magazines and radio programmes looking at soil degradation and desertification.

German development cooperation was involved in developing a pilot project in Pernambuco with the state's Ministry of Education and an NGO for environmental education. A 'Desertification Atlas' was developed in collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment as a 'door opener' for use in teaching. The combination of innovative teaching materials and a hands-on educational approach including project weeks and excursions also succeeded in raising awareness among teaching staff.

The pilot project was based in Aliança, where the teacher training centre for 'contextual

education' is situated. Contextual education aims to integrate students' living environment in the taught curriculum. The centre has taken the content and methods of the pilot project and is now distributing them through professional development programmes. The administrator responsible in the Ministry of Education said: *'Our aim is emancipatory education, focusing clearly on the Sertão's biodiversity, culture and history as well as the vibrancy of its people.'*

Content and methods are propagated

As a result of the professional development programme for teachers, there have been over 200 school projects on the environment and desertification to date. The most interesting examples were presented to representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministries of Education of the states and the UN Convention focal points. Today, contextual environmental education forms part of virtually all action programmes to combat desertification – not least as a result of the positive experience gained from the pilot project.

The pilot project achieved mainstreaming in the Pernambuco Ministry of Education. This is confirmed by Nilton de Silva Gomes of the department responsible for contextual education: *'The Ministry will be applying these methods throughout the entire state so that other groups of teachers and classes will benefit. We are also considering sharing our experience gained from the pilot project with other states in the Northeast.'*

Environmental education. Presentation of everyday reality in the dryland region during the 'week for the environment' of the community school of São Luiz, Pernambuco.



Policy advice: a strategy with four cornerstones

Another means of anchoring the issue of desertification throughout the entire region is the provision of direct policy advice. This was one of the main priorities of the programme. It consisted of four cornerstones:

- The development of **action programmes** with strategies for combating desertification supported jointly by all those involved.
- Embedding these action programmes in **institutional structures** so as to ensure effective implementation on a long-term basis.
- The mobilisation of **financial resources** to combat desertification and implement the action programmes.
- The formulation of an appropriate **legal framework**.

The process by which the action programmes are developed was outlined in the previous chapters. The focal points in the federal states were supported in embedding the action programmes in administration, government and social groups. However, this is not sufficient.

Professional implementation requires professional institutions

The focal points are not able to coordinate implementation of the action programmes



by themselves – the job is simply too big. Although many focal points are supported by highly committed volunteers, their time, capabilities and influence are limited. This is why professionalisation and institutional integration are required. In other words: effective institutional structures and administrative units are needed for the management of the state action programmes. The focal points developed coordinated proposals tailored to the situation of each of the federal states and these were integrated in the action programmes.

Group of women scrutinising the harvest of the common vegetable garden; Lagoa do Pau Ferro, Pernambuco.

Mainstreaming and its effects: sustainable forestry replaces destructive exploitation

Not least due to mainstreaming, sustainable forestry is now integrated in the PAEs and from here impacts on the forestry authorities. The focus is on the so-called land reform settlements. The land reform has mainly involved resettlement to regions with natural dry forest. Since there is a lack of consultancy and investment, and since income from agriculture is rarely sufficient to cover the cost of living, the only remaining option is deforestation and the sale of fuelwood or wood charcoal.

Small farmers in nine land reform settlements in Serra Talhada have shown that there is another way. Serra Talhada previously had the highest deforestation rate in the state of Pernambuco. Now, the small farmers here are showing how the Caatinga, the characteristic dry forest of the North-

east, can be protected. They are advised by the national forestry authority, among others with German support. Previously, the forest was destroyed to feed industry and commerce. 30 per cent of the latter's energy comes from fuelwood and wood charcoal – some 8.3 million cubic metres per year.

With new, sustainable methods, the small farmers are able to satisfy the demand for fuelwood without destroying the Caatinga. For this purpose, the cultivated forest is divided into sectors. Only one of 15 to 20 sectors is used each year, so the farmer does not use a sector again until 15 to 20 years later. Vegetation is able to regenerate during this period and the rich biodiversity maintained. Even after a few months, plants sprout and provide protection from erosion, thereby preventing desertification. Now more and more trees on cultivated land are left standing to provide shade and as a source of food for goats.

Tree nursery with indigenous plants for reafforestation of the Caatinga, Monte Alegre, Pernambuco.



Protection through use

During the first year of the project, the small farmers were able to produce over 8,000 sacks of wood charcoal and over 2,000 cubic metres of wood using sustainable methods. 'This allows settlers to make sustainable use of the sensitive Caatinga while protecting it at the same time,' says Newton Barcellos, head of the regional office of the forestry authority. The work is carried out during the dry season, i.e. the time of year in which the farmers would otherwise have to look for alternatives to working in the fields. The additional,



Farmer instructing youths in the use of a tree nursery for indigenous plants.

long-term income from sustainable forestry provides an incentive to protect the Caatinga. And the farmers are not forced to seek work in the cities in order to feed their families throughout the year. In Vila Bela for example, all farmers remained in the town thanks to sustainable forestry – even after an extreme drought destroyed 95 per cent of the harvest.

In addition to cultivated forest sectors, there are also areas under permanent protection. All in all over 50 per cent of the total surface area in the land reform settlements is protected or subject to sustainable cultivation. These figures are encouraging, considering the Caatinga has already been halved as compared to its original size, says Newton Barcellos. After all, in addition to the farmers there are also 500 small local companies living off the Caatinga which employ a staff of some 23,000, mainly women. From the raw materials provided by the Caatinga they produce honey, cosmetics, crafts, fibres, ingredients for herbal medicines, fruit, oilseed, oils and waxes.

Consultation has now been extended to 23 additional land reform settlements in Pernambuco and Paraíba. Apart from Serra Talhada there are eight other local communities receiving consultation in sustainable forestry in the state of Pernambuco, in this case in cooperation with the NGO 'Associação Plantas do Nordeste', which also has German support. In Paraíba this is carried out by the NGO SOS Sertão in another 14 land reform settlements. On all these projects there is close collaboration between the Ministry of the Environment, forestry authorities, state ministries, local NGOs and organised private fuelwood and wood charcoal users.

These examples are no longer exceptions. Even in 2007 there were a total of 322 registered management plans for the sustainable use of the Caatinga – some of them developed with German support. 78 per cent of the plans have been put into practice, covering a total surface area of around 150,000 ha. They are estimated to have provided some six per cent of the total amount of fuelwood required.

Establishing action programmes in institutions – results

- **Ceará** – In collaboration with the state foundation FUNCEME, the three focal points of this state developed a proposal for setting up a management unit for the PAE. Its aims include partnership-based regulation of the coordination and information exchange between those involved. German development cooperation advised partners in formulating job profiles and task descriptions.

The state parliament in Ceará has also contributed to the broad-based establishment of the action programme: the Strategic Council, a kind of parliamentary think-tank, has been working on a pact to develop the dryland areas since the beginning of 2010. It is to be agreed on the basis of the action programme – non-partisan, cross-institutional – between the state government, authorities, local communities and civil society. The focal points provide support for the Council. Thanks to a similar pact already in existence for water management, the Council has excellent contacts in the local communities – i. e. at a level at which there have been virtually no action programmes to date.

The focal points also collaborated with the economic research institute IPECE on a desertification index. This allows decision-makers to assess the need for action in intervention areas. The index is



Mixed cultures in a dryland region of Pernambuco.

based on an analysis of climate change and desertification processes and is an extension of the IMA index for early warning of adverse meteorological events, successfully in use since 2004.

- **Pernambuco** – In 2010 a state law was passed to combat desertification. It provides for close cooperation between the authorities and civil society as well as setting up a fund for combating desertification. It also requires the instigation of a management committee consisting of representatives of the responsible state ministries to manage the fight against

desertification and the implementation of the action programme.

At the same time, a citizens' forum was set up to ensure cooperation between the government and civil society; it is made up of representatives from local communities, NGOs and research institutions.

- **Rio Grande do Norte** – The state Ministry of the Environment approved the establishment of a management department for combating desertification and adaptation to climate change. This means that an initial proposal from the action programme is being implemented.

CEDEPLAR has forecast a reduction in the surface area suitable for agricultural use by 29 per cent until 2050 in Bahia – and by a drastic 79 per cent in Ceará. As a result, the gross regional output is predicted to drop by 11 per cent, with environmentally motivated migration into the conurbation areas increasing by up to 24 per cent.

It is a vicious circle: climate change reinforces desertification, desertification accelerates climate change. Fertile soil is an important reservoir of carbon, containing more CO₂ than the vegetation and the atmosphere together. The loss of fertile soil also means the loss of essential CO₂ storage.

Young people inform themselves about methods of organic farming; Bodocó, Pernambuco.

Climate change and desertification: mainstreaming through political consulting

Average temperatures will rise in the Northeast of Brazil. This means that extreme weather events such as periods of heavy rain and drought occur more frequently. Semi-arid areas are becoming arid and water – already in short supply – will become even scarcer. Climate change accelerates the process of degradation. All this impacts most heavily on poor sections of the population, who have little or no means to protect themselves against these effects of climate change.

Recent studies on climate change in the Northeast and the projected consequences for agriculture, employment and migration are alarming: the regional planning institute





Concrete political consulting

Smallhold farmer informing a group of youths on the construction of a system of agroforestry adapted to the dryland region, Triunfo, Pernambuco.

For this reason the UNCCD focal points were also provided with information on climate change. An event was held to discuss suitable adaptation strategies with the focal points. The renowned Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) also took part, as well as high-ranking protagonists involved in the Brazilian climate change plan: representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, the climate research institute CPTEC-INPE, the agricultural research institute EMBRAPA, the NGO forum FBOMS and the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF).

As a result of this event, the issue of adaptation to climate change was adopted as an integral strategy component of the action programmes. One example of this is the PAE of the state of Ceará, where climate scenario forecasts are especially alarming. The points agreed on here included the following:

- reforestation of the Caatinga with indigenous trees and shrubs (to slow down climate change)
- creation of alternative sources of income beyond agriculture (to compensate for the anticipated drop in productivity)
- realignment of energy production (e.g. by means of sustainable forestry to obtain fuelwood, energy-saving stoves and the use of alternative energies)
- promotion of alternative methods of use in agriculture and forestry so as to increase resilience to climate change

By the same token, the fight against desertification is also informing climate policy in the states. In Pernambuco it has been included as a key focus of the climate change plan. What is more, draft legislation for climate and desertification was developed jointly. Hélio

Polito, Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Environment of Pernambuco, provides the following rationale: *‘Pernambuco is especially susceptible to climate change. Around 90 per cent of its territory consists of semi-arid or dry sub-humid zones with clear tendencies towards desertification. Then there are problems of coastal erosion. Whether state policy is geared towards combating desertification or coastal erosion – both are equally important in adapting to climate change. It is impossible to treat these policy areas separately since their consequences are directly linked to one another.’*

While it is important for mainstreaming to provide information, bring protagonists together and develop jointly focused legislation, it is equally essential to link the combating of climate change and desertification at the institutional level.

Ceará – For the implementation of the action programme to combat desertification, the plan is to set up a ‘Desertification and climate change’ department. It was proposed that this should be taken on by the foundation FUNCEME, which already deals with climate change in Ceará. In order to involve civil society in an appropriate manner, initial steps have been taken to entrust the existing citizens’ forum on climate change to take on all three conventions (climate, biodiversity and climate change) and set up a working group on desertification and climate change.

Rio Grande do Norte – Implementation of the UNCCD action programme is to be assigned to a department of the Ministry of Environment and Water, which is involved with both climate change and combating desertification.

Since combating desertification protects natural resources, it also supports adaptation to climate change – especially where people are heavily dependent on natural resources.

In terms of the work in Northeastern Brazil, this means that adaptation to climate change has to be linked to the UNCCD action programmes. In other words: mainstreaming of the desertification agenda as part of the climate debate, and likewise mainstreaming of the adaptation agenda in the desertification debate.

Strategies to cope with limited financial resources

There is much uncertainty in terms of funding the action programmes since no budget has been provided for its implementation to date. For this reason it makes sense to tap into a number of different funding sources. In the early phase of the action programmes, before any comprehensive funding strategies had been developed, funding was successfully managed through specific projects. These are generally financed via the budget of the authorities responsible, such as the state agricultural or water ministries, where there is some degree of flexibility. In addition, funding and manpower support has also come from civil society or industry and commerce. As separate departments or management units are set up for the action programmes, funding is also provided from the state budgets.



The Caatinga in the dry season

Funds in the federal states ...

Another strategy was developed by the Pernambucan environmental authority SECTMA (Secretaria de Ciência, Tecnologia e Meio Ambiente) with German support: the establishment of environmental or desertification funds. The financial resources from these funds are awarded through a system of application or competition. Similar funds also exist in Ceará: there is an environmental fund, a fund to combat climate change and desertification as well as a Green Fund set up by a regional development bank.

In the future, such funds could be used not just to finance projects but also provide environmental services or compensate for temporary loss of income resulting from a sustainable subsistence strategy in the dryland regions. Examples of this are the planned

'Bolsa Verde' in Piauí and the FUNDAGUA in Espírito Santo, which is financed from oil production taxes and 60 per cent of which is to be used to pay for environmental services.

... or national environmental funds

A third strategy is to provide finance from earmarked national environmental funds, such as the 'Fundo Amazonas' which also provides funding for regions outside the Amazon region. But the most important source of finance for the action programmes will probably be the future Caatinga Fund which is to be used to finance the fight against desertification, resource protection in the dryland regions and sustainable management of the Caatinga. This 'Fundo Caatinga' was initiated by the state regional bank

of the Northeast, BNB, together with the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Integration. Funding for 2011 – USD 23 million from a debt swap – has already been secured. At a later stage, additional funding is to be added from the national climate change fund, voluntary donations from private individuals and companies and budget resources from the national and state governments.

Tapping into existing sources

A recurring problem is the failure to make the most of existing funding options – whether due to lack of information, or a lack of the necessary skill to develop project proposals which are able to attract funding. This shows how important it is to set up professional units to implement the action programmes so as to distribute information on funding instruments and provide support in formulating projects.

A legal framework is indispensable

The best action programme is only of limited use if it is not set within a legal framework. An example for this are the Brazilian federal laws on combating desertification, which have remained stalled in the parliamentary process for years.

By contrast, proposals for desertification policy in the federal states have emerged

from the grass roots upwards – starting with the development of the action programmes. A sound practice here was that the focal points from the state parliaments took part in the meetings, locally organised workshops and training programmes and were then able to take the outcomes back to the parliaments.

Ceará has had state-wide legislation since 2008. The district of Irauçuba serves as a model for the local level with its legislation.

Proposed legislation was drafted in Pernambuco with German involvement and passed by the state parliament in 2010. It governs cooperation between the authorities and civil society and stipulates the establishment of a fund for combating desertification as well as a management committee and a citizens' forum. What is more, an overriding strategy to combat the consequences of climate change was agreed on and the relevant laws passed.

In Rio Grande do Norte the focal point of the state parliament drafted a law on desertification policy with German support. The draft contains proposals on institutional structure and funding, which are taken from the action programme. It emphasises the cross-institutional character of the fight against desertification and the importance of involving trade and commerce in sustainable development strategies. In Rio Grande do Norte, too, an overriding strategy is being initiated to combat desertification and adapt to climate change.



Family of smallhold farmers preparing the ration for the farm animals.

Children are proud of the fresh drinking water from the cistern.

Lessons learned: adapt job profiles, diversify funding sources

- Committed leadership personalities and sustainable institutional structures contribute equally to the effective implementation of cooperative strategies to combat desertification. Our experience has shown how important it is to win over the focal points as key protagonists in developing a strategy for institutional integration. The development of implementation units, management committees and citizens' fora results in an ongoing redefinition of the functions and role descriptions of the focal points.
- The correct formulation of job profiles for new management units is a key factor in terms of successful cooperative implementation of the action programmes. But their introduction requires considerable persuasion since in the environmental sector there is a tendency towards technically oriented job descriptions not necessarily conducive to cooperation management.



- The involvement of representatives from the legislature – in Brazil the focal points of the state parliaments – has proved effective for mainstreaming, in particular in terms of creating the legal framework.
- More than anything, a sound funding strategy is one of diversification. Informal forms of funding – i. e. individual, project-related agreements – often work better in the early phase of development and implementation of action programmes. Funding is frequently drawn from existing, relatively flexible sectoral budgets. The task of effective implementation units is to identify such untapped sources of funding. However, financing of action programmes through environmental funds, as is the dominant pattern in Brazil, requires professional project formulation. Ongoing training programmes and specialist consultations should be offered for this purpose.



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