

## **Role of Local Bodies in Implementing the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Pakistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**UN Convention to Combat Desertification comes as a ray of hope for more than one billion people around the world whose lives are threatened by the adverse impacts of drought and desertification. District Councils and Union Councils in Pakistan may play an effective role in the implementation of the CCD in Pakistan, . This is because of the fact that Union Councils and District Councils have sufficient mechanism and infrastructure to implement and monitor the CCD activities. Furthermore, they could also develop the infrastructure and raise funds to combat land degradation in their respective areas. Similarly, these councils may also be used as platforms for the capacity building and training of the NGOs, CBOs and VOs in the affected areas. In addition to that these can also be treated as forums of accountability. As the Convention gives full-authority to local bodies to criticize the implementation mechanism of the CCD at any stage.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pakistan is a tropical country with vast semi-arid and arid tracks of land spread over 68 million hectares with the population of 145.5 million people in 2002 as against 130.580 million in 1998 showing an average growth rate of 2.1 percent. All of its provinces possess large share of land with valuable natural resources, which are being degraded at very high rate *i.e.*, Punjab 119,310 Km<sup>2</sup>, Sindh 134,896 Km<sup>2</sup>, Balochistan 149,467 Km<sup>2</sup> (Ahmad 1999) and its proportion is increasing because of over-exploitation of premature meadows beyond quick rehabilitation (Babaev 1999).

The government is indeed, striving hard for the development of the country but this development will be meaningless unless we first resolve the basic and fundamental problems caused due to environmental degradation, which threaten the survival of the growing population of the country. Government of Pakistan has adopted the Convention on April 22, 1997. The former federal minister for food and agriculture Syeda Abida Hussain said that concerted efforts at grassroots level are essential to combat the environmental problems. She said, "The Convention comes as a ray of hope for more than one billion people around the world whose lives are threatened by the adverse impacts of drought and desertification".

UN Convention to Combat Desertification, in many ways is a break through the status up quo. By drawing up and signing this convention more than 100 governments have made specific and solid commitments towards ensuring viable economic resources, friendly environment and sustainable living to proceed coming generation. Among many other things it involves local

people in finding their own solution to the issue relating desertification and land degradation. The Convention to Combat Desertification was adopted on June 17, 1994 and opened for signatures in October that year (Lean 1995). Containing 40 articles and four regional Annexes, out of those more than 8 articles are directly addressing to the local bodies (UNEP 1994).

Accompanied by political commitment and will, the Convention could represent a single internationally negotiated vehicle for bringing tangible benefits to the 900 million predominantly poor and food-insecure people who live in the dryland areas that cover 30% of the planet (Ahmad 1997).

Past approaches to resources conservation that excluded resource users failed because they: generated active local opposition; ignored the need of tangible incentives to farmers; and degenerated to an absence of management rather than the expected state management of dryland resources (Megateli *et al* 1997).

## **ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

In the past, development planners too often tended to ignore the people inspite of the fact that the poor communities know more than anyone else about the fragile ecosystem with which they have been endeavoring through out their lives. They should be the keys to combat the desertification. The Convention acknowledges this and recognizes that development must be human-orientated if it is to be sustainable. It breaks new ground and embraces a “bottom-up” approach, insisting that local people must be fully involved in deciding how to tackle the problem of desertification and that their poverty should be addressed.

The third principle of the Convention extends the concept of partnership. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring the participation of local people and their communities. It stresses upon the need that national plans must be carried out in a spirit of partnership, between the donor community, government at all levels, local population and community groups.

The institutions of Local Government assume a dynamic responsibility towards the development and maintenance of local resources, find out local initiatives and motivate the civil society towards a desirable change because:

Representatives of the local population who are given definite mandate by the communities of their areas and are run on democratic principles govern them,

Governors of local Governments have committed for the betterment of socio-economic and environmental conditions in their areas,

Institutions of local Government work within the limited areas of having face to face relations with the local population and stakeholders,

They are intermediaries between local population and the national Government and hence may guide the national planners by feeding them with the local initiatives, their essential needs, wishes and hopes,

Institutions of local Government have normally built an infrastructure and capacity to undertake development activities,

They represent both national Government and local population in favour to bringing a change in the attitude and behaviour of the stakeholders of beneficiaries.

## **EXPECTED PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL BODIES**

One of the most important elements of the Convention to Combat Desertification is formation of National Action Programme (NAP) by signatories, which is actually linked-up with the implementation of this Convention.

In practice NAP is to be drawn up by a democratic process, which will require the participation of all actors (stakeholders). Since National Action Programmes are the backbone of the implementation mechanisms of CCD. It is desirable that the local communities (figure 1) must be considered throughout all the development processes involving formulation, implementation and monitoring stages of plans consulted both at drafting and implementation stages. Although in Pakistan first draft (April 1994) and second draft (December 1996) of NAP are completed, yet no significant contribution of local communities was sought for these drafts. Nevertheless, a limited NGO participation was noticed in the first draft, which is a negligible representation of the Civil Society. It is desirable that a local participation of the indigenous and civil society is essentially needed for a dynamic and feasible NAP. This must be taken into account before the final approval of the NAP.

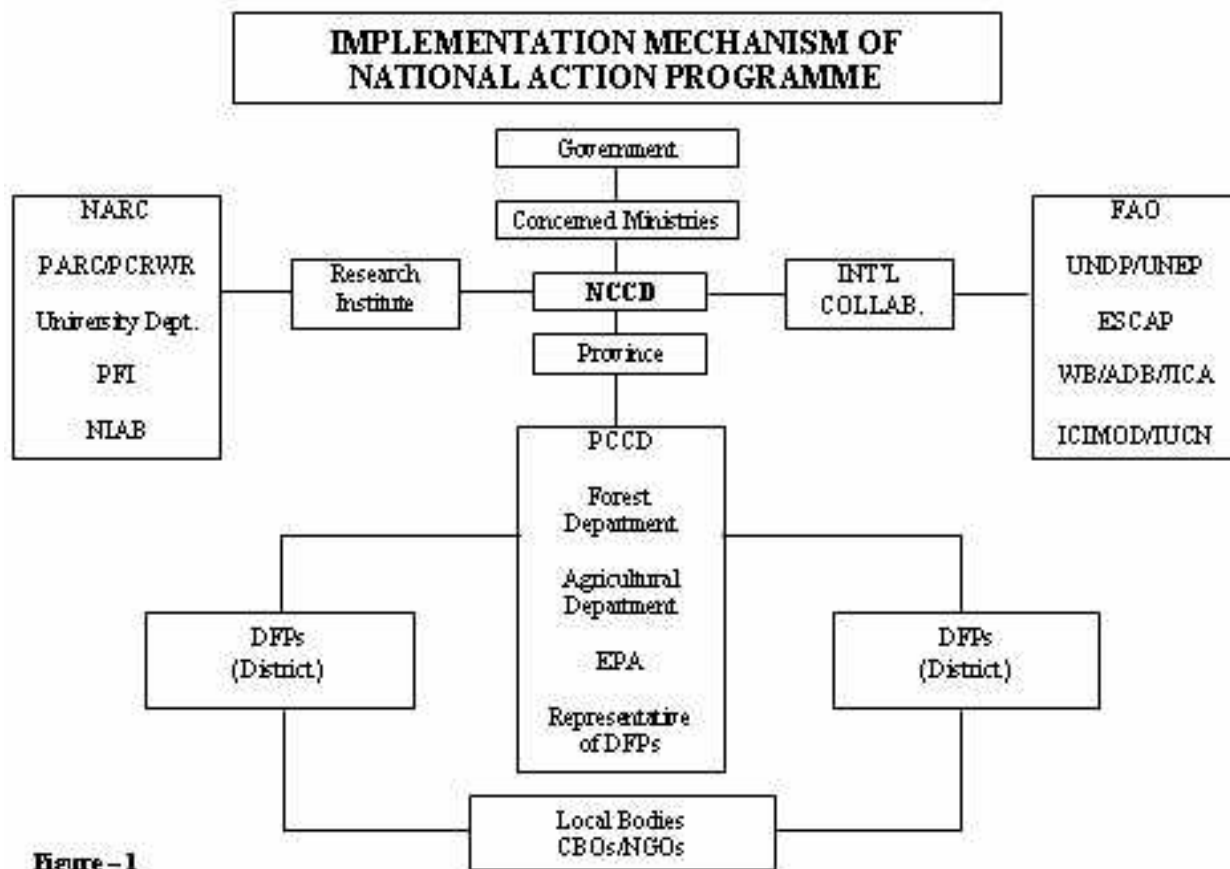


Figure - 1

**NCCD:** National Coordination Committee to Combat Desertification

**PCCD:** Provincial Coordination Committee to Combat Desertification

**DFPs:** District Focal Points, **CBOs/NGOs:** Community Based Organizations/Non-Governmental Organizations

## ROLE OF DISTRICT COUNCILS/UNION COUNCILS

District Councils and Union Councils may play an effective role in the implementation of the CCD in Pakistan. This is because of the fact that Union Councils and District Councils have sufficient mechanism and infrastructure to implement and monitor the CCD activities. Furthermore, they could also develop the infrastructure and raise funds to combat land degradation in their respective areas. Similarly, these councils may also be used as platforms for the capacity building and training of the NGOs, CBOs and VOs in the affected areas.

In addition to that these can also be treated as forums of accountability. As Convention gives full-authority to local bodies to criticize the implementation mechanism of the CCD at any stage. The institutions of local Government can play a significant role in:

- Disseminating people's perception to planners of provincial and federal governments,
- Helping in formulation of dynamic plan for sustainable development,
- Helping local communities for harnessing benefits from development activities and enhance their income,
- Providing essential infrastructure demanded for undertaking desirable development,

Extending meaningful evaluation and monitoring measures for development projects and feedback to planners,  
Create awareness building in civil society,  
Ensures accountability at various stages of the projects,  
Acquiring desired volume of funds from different agencies.

## CONCLUSION

In the light of above discussion we would like to suggest that for the successful implementation of CCD in Pakistan a very strong local involvement is needed to achieve the expected results. Therefore, it is recommended that Government of Pakistan must create a policy for participatory development based on local materials and techniques within the framework of existing indigenous and public property institutions.

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