

Intervention by Mr. Sudhir Mital, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests of India during the thematic discussions at CSD-16 on

“DESERTIFICATION”

7th May 2008

Mr. Chairman,

We associate ourselves with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of G-77. The Secretary General has rightly pointed out that desertification is a serious issue with implications on poverty eradication, socio-economic stability and sustainable development. We share the Secretary General's concern that poor people living in areas under desertification are facing multiple challenges including that of income loss, food insecurity, weakening health, insecure land tenure systems, access rights to natural resources, and lack of access to markets.

Mr. Chairman,

Combating desertification has been high on our agenda. Large river valley projects, which were operationalised as early as 1950s, were primarily aimed at providing irrigation and generating power. However, these projects also prioritized soil and water conservation, addressing land degradation, and socio-economic development. A network of National and State level research and extension institutions support measures to combat desertification through land use and soil surveys, categorisation of ravine areas, pilot projects on dry farming as well as treatment technologies for catchments, flood prone areas, and saline and alkaline areas. These institutions have assisted in the implementation of large-scale area development programmes undertaken with people's participation in a decentralized framework.

Mr. Chairman,

A large proportion of India's agricultural area is rain-fed, characterised by serious livelihoods vulnerabilities linked to access to quality natural resources. Accordingly, we have launched specific area development programmes which simultaneously build natural, physical, human, financial, political and social capitals of the affected communities. Legislative measures for employment guarantee, right to information and local government participation further improve the outcomes of these programmes by enhancing livelihood security, transparency and downward accountability respectively. A slew of environmental protection legislations and policies on air, water, land and forests, strives to ensure that development does not cause desertification.

Mr. Chairman,

Such efforts by developing countries, however, are not enough to meet the challenges of climate change adaptation. The population densities in drylands continue to grow. These populations are at the risk of further impoverishment, and hence have little choice but to expand their economic activities to meet their livelihoods needs. There is, therefore, an urgent need for far more commitments of the international community to join hands in supplementing the work being done by the national governments. Critical technologies and adequate finance must reach the stakeholders on the ground if sustainable development is to be achieved. Neither the markets nor the governments of dryland regions could possibly meet these challenges on their own. New and additional international financing mechanisms that incentivise the poor for conserving and developing their water, land and forest resources will also have spin-off benefits like climate change adaptation and conservation of biodiversity. We also need to ensure that these funds are additional in nature and do not divert existing development finance flows.
