Chapter VII: Conclusion
Globalisation, the advancement of information and communication technologies and the emergence of non-State actors played a crucial role in shifting the focus from government to governance. The traditional models of administration failed to comprehensively address many global problems. In the emerging web of transnational links, old forms of unilateral, hierarchical and top down decision-making patterns weakened and new forms became possible.

Governance, broader than government is a new process of governing or the new method by which society is governed. It consists of formal institutional arrangements and informal interactions. As a comprehensive and inclusive concept, governance is an all-encompassing, highly participatory, dynamic and engaging process. It seeks solutions to global problems including environmental challenges through dialogue, exchange and communicative action.

Humanity in the twenty-first century faces a new generation of environmental problems which are interlinked across institutional, thematic and geographic boundaries through rapidly changing socio economic processes. These differ significantly from past environmental problems. These new environmental issues share several common features. They are global in scope, transcending national boundaries and affecting all, or substantial portions of, the world’s population and natural resources. Their long-term consequences are irreversible and far reaching. The growing complexity and interconnectedness of environmental threats makes it more difficult to get an overview of a specific problem in all its dimensions-ecological, economic, sociological and political.

Historically, States did not easily accept environmental responsibility. As globalisation continued apace, environmental problems became increasingly complex, in some cases threatening the sustainability of human livelihoods in both rich and poor countries. With help of new technologies, the governments gradually realised that environmental challenges experienced at any given political level frequently have their origins at locations other than where their impact is most acutely felt. This ramifying and ever changing character of environmental problems and the inability of governments solely by their own efforts to fully protect their natural resources made environmental policy a subject for international action. Nevertheless, it is at the national level where the principal tasks of environmental protection must be performed.
At the national level it is the Public administration which represents the authority system for governments in action, and is expected to carry out politically determined objectives, goals and values. Therefore, the most critical attribute of public administration is its place in the political system and the paramount influence it has on the implementation of sustainable development policies and programmes at the national level.

In the era of globalisation, the winds of change amended the context within which governments operate. Policy makers now find themselves working in international environments, consequently they have to take into consideration the global implications of their domestic policies. Significantly, the complex nature of environmental problems are characterised by considerable degree of scientific uncertainties concerning their causes, impacts, feedbacks, and the interrelationships among complex natural and social parameters. In other words the national public administration must engage and work with a wide range of actors and institutions at different levels.

Today the processes of public policy formulation and its implementation are made up of these diverse, overlapping and integrated networks. These actors bring their own specific sets of powers, roles and responsibilities as determined by values, skills and organisational resources into the network arena.

These emerging new patterns of interaction between government and society at various levels can be observed in areas such as social welfare, environmental protection, education and physical planning. This changing nature of collaboration and partnership is apparently aimed at discovering other ways of coping with complex global problems or of creating new possibilities for governing. Therefore the effectiveness of international agreements and the regime embodying them will depend on the extent to which national policy efforts and initiatives actually comply with the international obligations.

Despite the increasing importance of other actors in the international environmental process, States remain the dominant players in both the development and implementation of international environmental accords. The international organisations, lack the authority and capacity to implement international norms directly, and hence the role of State administrative arrangements is essential and critical to translate policies into actions.
Global Environmental Governance (GEG) is the establishment and operation of a set of rules of conduct that define practice, assign roles and guide interaction so as to enable State and non-State actors to address environmental problems across national boundaries. Growing recognition of the complexity, pervasiveness, and mutual interdependence of environmental problems reshaped environmental regulation and natural resource management through multi-level coordination and engagement.

GEG began to emerge in a significant way only in the late 1960s and 1970s, as part of a growing concern about environmental problems. The Stockholm Conference in 1972 launched global efforts to protect, preserve and enhance the environment. International environmental accords- treaties and agreements were the core of these structured collective efforts. These global environmental instruments, collectively known as Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are the legal framework for GEG and constitute a very substantial part of international legal arrangements. They are the official expression of the collective determination of governments to protect the environment.

Standing at the intersection between domestic, international, and global pressures, the State is the preeminent institution with the requisite political authority and steering capacity to address environmental problems through MEAs and national legislations. The past few decades witnessed a remarkable increase in the breadth and depth of international environmental cooperation and led to a proliferation of MEAs at an unprecedented level. With intensified use of international treatises as a means to address global environmental problems, concerns were expressed regarding the compliance of States with obligations to which they agreed under a MEA.

Implementation of these international instruments occurs at the national level through the enactment of legislation, promulgation of regulations, and enforcement of rules and procedures. Implementation is what transforms an MEA from a legal document to a functioning regime. Therefore it is typically a critical step toward compliance of a global treaty.

Basically the global environmental instruments are only as effective as the parties make them. Effectiveness is the result of not only how government implement accords (the formal legislation or regulations that countries adopt) but also of compliance (the observance of these regulations and commitments contained in the international accords). In other words compliance goes beyond the implementation
stage. Therefore implementation is generally an essential predicate for compliance. However effective implementation of MEAs at the national level often meets significant challenges, especially in countries with weak governance structures and poor institutional capacity.

While it has been observed that most States comply with most international treaties most of the time, there are reasons to believe that national implementation of and compliance with global accords is not only imperfect but often inadequate. However there are only a few systematic studies of factors affecting compliance with international environmental accords into which countries have already entered. Among them, there are even fewer studies that focus on factors at the national level affect compliance. Within this framework of GEG, this study analysed the implementation of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and their compliance with the same.

The UNCCD is the newest link in the evolving international institutional arrangements for environmental governance. In linking serious environmental issues with socio-economic developmental concerns, this convention can be viewed as a significant step towards building a multilateral framework for sustainable development. This Convention also recognises desertification primarily as a problem of sustainable development, poverty and human well-being, and environmental protection. Therefore it is a much more comprehensive treaty than earlier efforts to address desertification.

Desertification is a problem of global magnitude with far-reaching environmental and socio-economic consequences. It is a complex issue, which arises not from a single, identifiable cause, but from complex interactions among physical, biological, political, social, cultural and economic factors. The process of desertification affects almost every region, but it is most destructive in the drylands of the America, Asia and Africa. The countries most seriously affected by desertification usually are developing countries which do not have the adequate technical and financial means of coping with a problem of such magnitude.

The GCC countries are situated in extremely arid zones. These countries are endowed with natural resources in the form of combined oil and natural gas reserves, but they are less fortunate in the critical resources of productive land and accessible renewable water resources. The source, nature and intensity of environmental degradation differentiate this region from the rest of the world. This is not because of
the interaction between man-made and natural environmental problems but because of the magnitude and speed with which this interaction takes place.

The GCC countries have various degrees of economic potential but all are severely affected by desertification. Over the past few decades, all the GCC countries witnessed an unprecedented economic and social transformation. The enormous oil wealth created modern physical and social infrastructures and substantially raised the standard of living of the population. These included the provision of such expensive services. However, the large-scale industrialisation, inefficient use of limited resources, unplanned urbanisation, large-scale consumption, higher population growth and lack of regulatory mechanism produced a critical environmental situation in the GCC countries. These unprecedented levels of socio-economic transformation coupled with limited natural resources created a number of major environmental issues.

The public administration in the GCC countries, which is expected to carry out the developmental objectives, goals and values, faces a tough challenge. The administrative system in these countries, although simple until recently, is being steadily inflated due to an unclear vision of future objectives and the abundance of financial resources. It is suffering from structural and behavioural defects of both external and internal origin. Bureaucratic dysfunctions are rampant in these countries with excessive powers and unrestrained habits of intervention in every aspect of society.

During the past few decades public administration was saddled with socio-economic development that did not serve the cause of equity and social justice in the society. The list of bureaucratic deficiencies incorporates adjectives such as lethargic, apathetic, arrogant, corrupt, insensitive to the masses, non-innovative, venal and incompetent. Governments in the GCC countries never learned the lessons of sharing responsibility and control with citizens, local authorities or the private sector.

The existing environmental organisations were not designed to address complex cross-sectoral and transboundary issues. The national environmental governance landscape evolved in a largely linear, sectoral fashion to provide specific services. These institutional arrangements are inadequate and insufficient to keep up with the fast pace at which economic growth is generating cumulative environmental degradation. These are critical issues in the GCC countries, where governments often feel overburdened with various international commitments. They also lack the
required capacity and adequate financial and human resources to pursue these cross-sectoral, integrated strategies for ensuring sustainable development. In this background, this study critically analysed the role of the administrative system in the GCC countries in implementing the UNCCD.

Despite governmental efforts to prevent and reduce land degradation at the national, sub regional and regional levels, only limited success was achieved. The progress made so far is not sufficient to reverse the trends. Inadequate land resource policies, centralised governance, lack of public participation, low-profile expertise, and lack of comprehensive approach to planning and management of natural resources affected effective implementation of the UNCCD.

The first hypothesis of this study was that large-scale socio-economic developmental activities and the harsh climatic conditions accelerated the intensity and magnitude of desertification in GCC countries. This has been validated through the following findings.

The unprecedented levels of socio-economic transformation coupled with limited natural resources created a number of major environmental issues in these countries including desertification. The percentages of desertified land are high in the GCC countries ranging from 89 percent in Oman to 100 percent in Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE and Qatar. Fertile agricultural land around major cities was lost to urbanisation, industrial establishments and transportation infrastructure. Similarly the deterioration of rangeland and farm productivity is forcing farmers to abandon agricultural land and migrate to cities, increasing pressure on services and infrastructure.

In the GCC countries agriculture accounts for a small portion of the GDP and does not constitute an important source of employment, except in Oman and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia. However geopolitical instability in and around the countries of West Asia persuaded governments of the GCC countries to adopt policies aimed at achieving national food security. These policies were accompanied by agricultural protectionism, the erection of trade barriers and provision of subsidies for agricultural inputs in several forms, including wells, fuel, energy, inputs, price support programmes, trade protection, and free access to unlimited amounts of groundwater, most of which is non renewable. This led to large-scale expansion of agricultural activities in the GCC Countries.

Without exception, all of the GCC countries are extracting groundwater resources in an unsustainable manner. In Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the
UAE, this represents a level of extraction in excess of the natural recharge of the aquifers. In the case of Saudi Arabia, this represents the accelerated extraction of non-renewable resources without adequate knowledge of the finite life of water supplies within the aquifers. Over-abstraction of water resources affected the quantity and quality of groundwater. This led to seawater intrusion along the shoreline, causing salinisation of coastal agricultural lands. About 2 million ha of irrigated land area in Saudi Arabia and 33.6% of the cultivated land of Bahrain are moderately salinised. For example in Qatar around 30% of irrigated agriculture land is salinised. Similarly about 68 farms went out of production due to salinisation (in Qatar). The yield in state farms decreased by 30% or about 1500 ha from irrigated soil degraded due to salinisation.

Pollution from agriculture, including fertilisers and pesticides runoff and increased salts, added to increasing amounts of industrial and toxic waste and urban pollutants, combine to lower the quality of water. Marine biodiversity in the GCC countries is under severe stress, primarily from oil spillage. Indigenous plants and animals in this region are under increasing threat due to the impact of development. Urban transportation also increased the pollution level in cities.

The second hypothesis was that political and economic issues remain top on the agenda of the GCC countries rather than environmental issues. This has been validated through the following findings. Only Kuwait signed the UNCCD when it was opened for signature i.e. before the convention came into force. All the other GCC Countries became Party to the Convention after it came into force in 1996.

Ministers in charge of Environmental Affairs in the GCC countries in March 2005 decided to set up a Regional Centre for Environmental Disasters and Crises. They also agreed to establish several other projects aimed at ensuring a healthier and safer environment in the region including a specialised Regional Environmental Laboratory, an Environmental Database and Regional Centre for Training and Technology Transfer specialised in Hazardous Waste Management. However, there is no progress on setting up these institutions to address the environmental problems in the GCC countries.

In 2007 the Arab officials rejected a UN proposal to set up a Regional Environmental Training Centre in West Asia because it would include Israel. The delay to establish relevant technical research and training institutions due to inaction
and political reasons shows that environment is not in the agenda of the GCC countries.

Another example is the Sustainable Arid Land Management (SALAM) Project which was announced in 2006. The Global Mechanism proposed to develop a multi-country programme that brings the GCC countries together with the neighbouring Arab States in a partnership for Sustainable Land Management practices to facilitate improved livelihoods and ecological services. This programme aimed at responding to the special requirement of the region with regard to the respective countries' different development trajectories and unique ecological context. Beyond the borders of the GCC countries, the region also includes countries with economies in transition that face challenging socio-economic, political and environmental hurdles.

However this project is still in the preparatory phase and is not launched yet.

The GCC countries failed to use this Convention as a frame work for international solidarity to bring about more scientific, technical and financial cooperation. For example, in order to implement the pilot projects of the Sub Regional Action Programme for West Asia, the Global Mechanism mobilised US$ 350,000 committed by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development. These funds, however, were not sufficient to support activities in all participating member countries. Therefore it was agreed to implement the projects in phases as funds become available. If the GCC countries used their political influence, they could have mobilised more resources from other regional and international financial institutions including the Islamic Development Bank. Even the World Bank agreed earlier to support the subregional action programme, but later withdrew. Although the GCC countries, by becoming a party to the Subregional Action Programme, implemented the provisions of the UNCCD, by showing lack of interest in mobilising adequate resources to implement the convention, failed to comply with it.

The GCC governments consistently recognised the valuable role of the scientific and academic communities in efforts to combat desertification through their ongoing technical research programmes and studies. However, they spend far too little on research and development of new technology and do not use their political and economic clout effectively enough to force the developed world to share their technology and research with it. Similarly Science and Technology (S&T) in general and Research & Development (R & D) in particular are not institutionalised in these
Rehabilitation of degraded land is an important component of the global strategy to address the issue of desertification. Except Saudi Arabia, no other GCC country made efforts to rehabilitate the degraded drylands in their respective countries. Since rehabilitation of degraded lands is a part of the national efforts to address desertification, the failure of most of the GCC countries to initiate measures to rehabilitate their degraded lands reflect their poor compliance with the provisions of the UNCCD.

The fourth hypothesis was that only limited provisions of the UNCCD were implemented in these countries. This has been validated. Among the GCC countries, there was no reporting from Bahrain and Oman since 2000. Only Saudi Arabia and UAE submitted all the reports. Secondly Parties are required to communicate their reports in one of the official languages of the COP. Parties are also encouraged to submit their reports, or at least their summary, in English in order to disseminate them widely. However Bahrain (2000), Kuwait (2002 & 2004), Saudi Arabia (2000) and UAE (2006) submitted their reports in Arabic without summary in English (table 5.6). This affects the wider circulation of the details of the status of desertification-related activities in the GCC countries. Qatar did not establish the national coordination bodies to implement the convention. Even the composition of National Coordination Committees, in other GCC countries shows lack of people’s participation, especially NGOs. Only a few research institutes are included in these committees. Lack of people’s participation in the UNCCD related activities is in contrast with the very spirit of UNCCD principles and objectives.

Instead of establishing new research institutes, the GCC countries mostly rely on the regional specialised agencies or academic institutes on an ad hoc basis for consultation on desertification-related issues. In the GCC countries a comprehensive assessment of the indigenous knowledge is still a weak point.

At the subregional level due to lack of financial resources the pilot projects were not able to start. There was a poor response from the GCC countries in mobilising adequate resources. At the regional level, only Saudi Arabia participated in four Asian Thematic Programme Networks (TPNs), out of six. Qatar was involved in two and Oman in one. The other GCC countries did not show any interest to participate at the regional level. This reflects two things. This reflects two things. Firstly the majority of the GCC countries failed to fulfil the commitments under the UNCCD to cooperate at the regional level. Secondly the GCC countries also failed to
obtain the benefits they could have received if the participated in these programmes. In Asia, the initiatives taken at various levels (national, sub-regional and regional) resulted in large databases being set up, and the work of harmonising the desertification monitoring/assessment procedures is very well advanced. Discussions are in progress to establish a frame of reference that can be used as a kind of control panel, so as to monitor progress on combating desertification.

Despite having similar physical and natural features and closer geographical proximity, except Oman, none of the GCC countries showed interest to get involved in the WANA regional programme.

The fifth hypothesis was that lack of an effective mechanism for people’s participation is a major constraint in addressing the desertification problem in the GCC countries. Public participation brings legitimacy, credibility, and effectiveness to the policy making process and its implementation. Civil society plays an important role in bringing emerging environmental issues to the attention of policy makers, raising public awareness, promoting innovative ideas and approaches in environmental decision-making at different levels.

Historically the overall model of governance in the GCC countries is State-led, State-centered, and State-regulated. The rental State which emerged out of natural sources of wealth controlled by the state, together with a political structure which took the form of traditional monarchies dominated by one family gave rise to public governance that minimises the role and participation of its civil society, magnifies the role of the state in the area of social welfare and distribution of rent.

Despite their importance, the civil society’s participation in the UNCCD implementation process in the GCC countries is inadequate. Even though all the GCC countries, except Qatar established National Coordination Committees, the composition shows a lack of people’s participation, especially NGOs. Only a few research institutes are included in these committees. Lack of people’s participation in the UNCCD related activities is in contrast with the very spirit of UNCCD principles and objectives.

The number of accredited NGOs from the GCC countries is negligible. Only Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and UAE have one accredited NGO each. Kuwait, Oman and Qatar do not have even a single accredited NGO. On the other hand the neighbouring countries have a reasonable number of accredited NGOs. For example Egypt has five and Jordan and Lebanon have two each.
The sixth and last hypothesis of this study was that in GCC countries radical reform measures are required in the areas of recruitment, training and administrative procedures. Bureaucracies in these countries substituted routine work, self-serving behavior, and survival techniques to risk-taking management. Such bureaucratic behaviours are a major obstacle to numerous campaigns for administrative reform, generally decreed by the political leaders. Thus, avoidance of responsibility, apathy, or inaction became among the survival techniques frequently employed by bureaucrats. The weak capacity for innovation coupled with clerkism in administration hampers effective implementation of development goals.

Even though this work established the need for reforms in environmental administration in these countries, the relevant and suitable methods of recruitment, training and administrative procedure could not be provided due to non-availability of data. Therefore this hypothesis remains inconclusive.

The GCC countries undertook a number of measures individually as well as collectively. These initiatives have either a direct or an indirect impact on the efforts to combat desertification. However these are at the early stage which makes it difficult to draw conclusion. The following are some of the important individual efforts. Saudi Arabia decided to abandon wheat cultivation to protect depleting ground water. It also planned to increase the plan allocation for R & D as part of its 20-year National Science and Technology Plan and the number of bio reserves to protect the environment.

Qatar is in the process of introducing an environment-friendly public transport system of solar cars and battery-powered buses to reduce pollution and save energy. It also approved to set up camel farms to combat desertification. It also signed an MoU with the UNEP to enhance understanding, co-ordination and technical assistance for implementing the Qatar National Environment Plan (QNEP).

Oman adopted a master plan to regulate water management. Bahrain enacted legislation to strictly monitor the use of groundwater and drilling of wells and improving irrigation techniques including sprinkler irrigation system. Bahrain initiated a programme to replace Alfalfa with other suitable crops, like Rhodes grass, Barley, Oats, Ryegrass, Sudan grass, and others, requiring not only less volumes and frequency of irrigation but also those which could withstand higher salinity and adverse drainage situation. By replacing alfalfa with other forage crops, a saving of 15 million cubic meters per year is anticipated.
UAE unveiled a strategic plan to save ground water and solar energy. These are the few examples of the GCC countries’ individual efforts to protect natural resources in their countries.

Similarly the GCC countries took several measures collectively which will go a long way in ensuring the sustainable development of this region. These significant measures include adoption of the Gulf Green Initiative 2007 which focuses on unifying all environmental legislations among the GCC countries and the formulation of three integrated development projects-GCC rail network, GCC power grid and GCC water link. These three integrated development projects have huge potential to conserve energy and natural resources in this region. For example the rail network is expected to reduce the GCC countries’ heavy reliance on road transportation which resulted in a major negative side-effect: the growing problem of road accidents.

However lack of centralised databases on desertification issues, inadequate monitoring and assessment, poor capacity-building for focal points and NGOs affect sustainable development in these countries. Furthermore, in the GCC Countries, there is no comprehensive assessment of the degradation of irrigated land, rain-fed cropland or rangeland. Given the economic potential of these countries and the threatening extent to which desertification is impeding sustainable growth, more extensive cooperative and participatory efforts are necessary. Adequate and reliable financial resources are necessary to address these shortcomings. The information base on the current magnitude of and trends in desertification both at the national and the subregional level needs substantial improvement. New technologies, techniques, methods, approaches, skills, ideas and systems will facilitate the efficient and effective use of limited and scarce natural resources in these countries.

The GCC countries may appropriately adopt the recommendations proposed in the implementation report of the first phase of pilot projects, while starting the next phase of the SRAP pilot projects in their countries.

The major finding of this study is that not only many of the provisions related with the UNCCD were not implemented, but even the implemented provisions were not fully complied with. The initiatives taken in recent years will go a long way in bridging this gap.