

United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification



Land is life, keep drylands working

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Quick Pocket Facts¹

People Facts	Global	Drylands	Proportion %
Global Population	6.5. billion ²	2.1. billion	32.2
Annual water needs	2000 cubic meters	1300 cubic meters	65
Average Infant Mortality	49 per 1000 ³	54 per 1000	65

Land Facts	Global	Drylands	Proportion %
Land Mass	1476 m sq km	60.9 m sq km	41.3
Cultivated systems	39.6 m sq km	16. 23m sq km	44
Carbon Reserves	3,104 gigatonnes	1,430 gigatonnes	46

¹) Data from 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

²) United Nations, 2004. World Population Prospectus, in Population and Vital Statistics Report, Statistical Papers, Series A Vol. LIX, No.1, 1 January 2007, Table 1, p4.

³) World Bank, World Development Indicators, Online version, accessed 24 July 2010, http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators?cid=GPD_WDI.

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Purpose

With more lands around the world facing increasing deterioration and degradation, the United Nations General Assembly declared the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification, which will run from January 2010 to December 2020 to promote action that will protect the drylands. The Decade is an opportunity to make critical changes to secure the long-term ability of drylands to provide value for humanity's well being.

Global Value

Drylands are home to 2.1 billion people; for every three people, one calls drylands home. Drylands meet the basic needs of a significant proportion of the world, but are under threat. They harbor some of the world's most valuable and rarest biodiversity. They are major contributors to the world's breadbasket, considering that one in every three crops under cultivation today has its origins in the drylands. They are valuable indigenous food vaults because the wild ancestors and relatives of these plants still grow there. Drylands support 50% of the world's livestock, are wildlife habitats and account for nearly half of all cultivated systems.

Key challenge

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005 estimates that 10% of the drylands suffer from one or more forms of land degradation. Poverty is one of the causes as well consequence of desertification. Recent assessments showing that poverty eradication is lagging most in the arid areas suggest that it is not only undermining the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals but may also hinder ongoing efforts to recover degraded land. With climate change drought will emerge in new areas, making them more vulnerable to degradation, while areas already prone to drought will suffer more frequent and intense droughts.



»one in three calls drylands home«

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Why now?

Still, there is good news. When attended to, degraded lands recover. According to the most recent Global Assessment of Land Degradation and Improvement report published in 2008, most of the previously degraded land recovered between 1981 and 2003 was in the drylands. Researchers have also found improvements in livelihoods where land is rehabilitated. The UNDDD aims to build on this momentum and accelerate the rehabilitation and conservation of drylands and eradication of poverty.

Coordination

The Decade events and campaigns are open to all. They are spearheaded by the UN agencies tasked with this role by the UN General Assembly in December 2009. These are UN Department of Public Information (DPI), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

Key terms

Drylands refer to arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, and excludes deserts, when used in the context of sustainable development. *Desertification* refers to the land degradation in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities. When land degradation happens in the world's drylands, it often creates desert-like conditions.

Orgins of the Decade

Building on the successful celebration of the International Year of Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification (IYDD) in 2006, the United Nations General Assembly, by its resolution A/RES/62/195 of 2007, declared 2010 to 2020 the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification (UNDDD). The Assembly acknowledged the persistence of desertification, despite past and on-going global efforts, and a slow response to poverty eradication among drylands populations, and declared the Decade a period for concerted global action. During the Decade, all actors are called upon to raise awareness about desertification, land degradation and drought and their solutions. The Decade campaign is intended to reinforce the implementation of the ten-year strategy for 2008-2018, on the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. At the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General will report on progress made to implement the resolution.

»there is good news«

