



"From Thoughts to Action"

GRF Fact Sheet on Desertification

On the occasion of June 17, 2010

UNCCD World-day 2010 to Combat Desertification

"Enhancing soils anywhere enhances life everywhere"

Desertification

- "Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. It is caused primarily by human activities and climatic variations."¹
- "Desertification does not refer to the expansion of existing deserts. It occurs because dryland ecosystems, which cover over one third of the world's land area, are extremely vulnerable to over-exploitation and inappropriate land use. Poverty, political instability, deforestation, overgrazing and bad irrigation practices can all undermine the productivity of the land."¹
- "Over 250 million people are directly affected by desertification, and about one billion people in over one hundred countries are at risk. These people include many of the world's poorest, most marginalized and politically weak citizens."¹
- "Desertification is primarily a problem of sustainable development."²

Causes of Desertification resp. the Degradation of Drylands

- "Climatic fluctuations."³
- "The relatively low priority given to environmental protection often leads to poor land management decisions."³
- "Slow human adjustment to natural climate fluctuations."³
- "International economic forces that encourage people to overexploit their land."³
- "Ignorance, errors, and natural and man-made disasters."³
- "Increasing populations and population densities."³

Consequences of Desertification

- "Desertification reduces the land's resilience to natural climate variability."⁴
- "Soil becomes less productive."⁴
- "Vegetation becomes damaged."⁴
- "Some of the consequences are borne by people living outside the immediately affected area."⁴
- "Food production is undermined."⁴
- "Desertification contributes to famine."⁴

- “Desertification has enormous social costs, fostering mass migration and social conflicts.”⁴
- “Desertification is a huge drain on economic resources.”⁴
- “Desertification undermines the land’s productivity and contributes to poverty.”⁴
- “Desertification exacerbates poverty and political instability.”⁵
- “Desertification contributes significantly to water scarcity, food crisis, and internal displacement of people, mass migration, and social breakdown. This is a recipe for political instability, for tensions between neighbouring countries, and even for armed conflict. Evidence is mounting that there is often a strong correlation between civil strife and conflict on the one hand and environmental factors such as desertification on the other.”⁵

Combat Desertification

- “Combating desertification is essential to ensuring the long-term productivity of inhabited drylands.”¹
- “Desertification can be reversed only if far-reaching changes are made in local and international behavior. Step by step, these changes will ultimately lead to sustainable land use and food security for a growing world population. Combating desertification, then, is really just part of a much broader objective: the sustainable development of countries affected by drought and desertification.”¹
- “Unfortunately, past efforts have too often failed, and around the world the problem of land degradation continues to worsen.”¹

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

“Recognizing the need for a fresh approach, over 110 governments have signed the **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**. This Convention aims to promote effective action through innovative local programs and supportive international partnerships. The treaty acknowledges that the struggle to protect drylands will be a long one – there will be no quick fix. This is because the causes of desertification are many and complex, ranging from international trade patterns to the unsustainable land management practices of local communities. Real and difficult changes will have to be made, both at the international and the local levels.”¹

References

The information provided in this fact sheet on desertification is based on the following information provided by the UNCCD on www.unccd.int:

¹The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: An Explanatory Leaflet

²The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: Factsheet no. 1

³The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: Factsheet no. 2

⁴The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: Factsheet no. 3

⁵The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: Factsheet no. 10