

Land degradation and climate change : time to act !



The timescale for soil to form stretches over thousands of years. Soil degradation and loss of arable land are among the major challenges facing humanity. All causes combined (rising temperatures, poor agricultural practices and urban sprawl), this global phenomenon threatens the future of society and can be exacerbated, here and there, by land grabbing. It defies people's security and food sovereignty and jeopardises vital services for life on Earth provided by ecosystems for years to come.

Rapid land degradation also deprives us of its priceless ability to store carbon, while swift cuts in atmospheric CO2 levels, constantly reiterated by the scientific community, are a top priority.

The years pass and time is short. 2015 raised high hopes with the adoption, in September, in New York, of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (including the target 15.3 for a land degradation-neutral world) and, in December, in Paris, at the COP21, of a climate agreement providing a specific

framework for commitment and action by States and non-State actors. Although these universally approved procedures form a precious foundation to guide the international community in its priorities, action is now a global dictate, which must be widely embodied over and above words.

The international summit of non-state actors Désertif'actions 2017 appears like an answer to the need to act by creating synergies between actors in the fight against desertification and climate change.

High-level plenary and the 12 thematic workshops permitted to facilitate the exchange of ideas between the participants, who have reminded in a final statement the importance of a stronger interaction between land and climate change issues.

In my opinion, ONLY civil society can outline and define who we will become and what we will become as a society. It is your passion and your commitment that will outline and define our relationship with the world.

Monique Barbut - Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.



Adaptation and mitigation have emerged as a priority for populations already impacted and for whom the preservation of natural resources is essential. Way of exploitation is directly concerned as well as the forms of land tenure; land grabbing becoming a real problem. The different concepts and initiatives that have emerged in recent years provide a framework for action but fund rising still remains one of the limiting factors. In this context the mobilization of all is necessary. In this way, role of women and collectivities through decentralized cooperation process, in the valorization of the land was an element of reflection.



Worldwide, 2015 was the hottest year since 1850



22 millions climate refugees in 2013, equivalent to the population of Ivory Coast



Drylands account for 1/3 of the emerged land on the planet



Desertification directly impacts 44% of cultivated systems

Extract from the *Désertif'actions 2017*

(...) Following the declarations from the "Climate and Territories" summit in Lyon, in 2015, and "Climate Chance 2016" in Nantes, we stress that without this territorial approach, focused as closely as possible on local communities and stakeholders, we cannot implement sustainable policies to combat land degradation and deliver rehabilitation activities.

We highlight that rallying local and regional stakeholders around these challenges is crucial and that they should be aware that urban sprawl, in both the North and the South, must be fully contained and pre-empted. We stress the importance of providing elected representatives, especially those in the South, with planning and land management tools, and that funding these tools, which is ultimately inexpensive given the stakes involved, must be prioritised by the international community.

To this end, we support the development of decentralised cooperation initiatives for land restoration, by emphasising the importance of sharing experience, exchanging good practice and disseminating lessons learned.

We urge territorial stakeholders to procure regional food plans that empower them and boost their sovereignty, include a balance between production and consumption and safeguard the diversity of arable land. We also encourage the implementation of ecologically-intensive agricultural policies that respect human health and future generations.

Desertification is the catalyst for all inequalities, all forms of poverty, all kinds of extremism and all types of violence. Taking action to restore land is about providing a life plan and hope to communities suffering the most from desertification. It also extends a hand to all those pushed by misery on to the main roads in the cities of the North and South and contends the unacceptable tragedy of forced and irregular migration. Combatting desertification is equally about helping the most destitute to regain their dignity.

Extract taken from a message by Nicholas Hulot, Government Minister for Ecological and Inclusive Transition, to participants.



- Adaptation and resilience -

Resilient territories are those with the ability to bounce back after shocks or major changes. These include those caused by human activity on natural resources. The growing impacts of climate change add to this and complicate matters further. Adaptation has therefore become an inevitable course of action.

The workshop highlighted the limits of conventional knowledge in a rapidly evolving world and, in this respect, science, itself, is not above producing catastrophes. As such, there must be a dialogue and combination of ancestral and scientific wisdom for robust knowledge. Furthermore, peer learning is an important source (e.g. from one livestock farmer to the other), as much can be learnt from discussions, such as mutual errors. In this sense, adaptation of the rural environment can also be spurred on by activities undertaken in urban areas. Slow-food movements, or the spread of ecological farming illustrate this. They do not stem from scientific and technological dexterity, but are entirely based on re-arranging communities all the way along a productive chain. It should not however be forgotten, as the case study on the cashmere sector showed, that adaptation and resilience meets a need to address climate change, but also one to address all manner of economic constraints.



- Financing -

Funding is urgently needed to roll out of sustainable farming and forestry practices that promote soil restoration, food security and protect vulnerable people. These sustainable farming and forestry practices can also store carbon cheaply and consequently provide many shared benefits. In terms of the size of funding requirements to combat land degradation, it is vital to secure viable projects, public funders, development banks and private investors to provide financial support for this strategy.

This must be delivered in a framework guaranteeing the general interest. Indeed, private investment, by its very nature, firstly requires a return on investment and the creation of value. There is therefore a danger of favouring an export-driven ethos to offset weak local markets. As part of new processes introduced, the first projects funded (particularly by LDN funding) should have a demonstration and educational role to better define the types of stakeholders and projects that must effectively have access to funding. Among these stakeholders, small-scale producers should be favoured, given their number, labour force and the surface area they cultivate. The workshop consequently stressed the difficulties these small-scale players had in accessing funding and as a result, highlighted the requirement for public investment in national budgets matching challenges and needs.



- Land Degradation Neutrality -

Land degradation neutrality corresponds to target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations for the period 2015-2030. Meeting this target is part of the key challenges of the parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. General guidelines are inadequate to deliver neutrality. Considering the local context and cooperation between local and national levels is vital. This involves widespread involvement of representative stakeholder groups, making for a consistent project with development perspectives for the people living in the area and the sharing of good practice.

Although implementing solutions to land degradation must scrupulously include “avoid, decrease and restore” sequences, it is better to accentuate the “avoid” part for greater overall effectiveness and thereby combat the main causes of land degradation. Applying sustainable land management methods must favour ecologically intensive agriculture systems. Most of the time, these methods exist and must be scaled for use, hence the importance of linking civil society and people working on the ground to national activities to prepare and implement neutrality, as is the case in Burkina Faso and Niger.



- Land tenure -

Land tenure is often invoked as a prerequisite for investment to rehabilitate and preserve land. However, several questions arise on procedures to ensure this security, especially concerning farmland (private property, written and unwritten rights, rights of use, etc.). Indeed, the challenges remain and there is a danger that security of access to land, by purchasing or leasing, is leading to a new form of inequality, such as that denounced in South America. During the workshop, the link was made between managing natural resources and their long-term and secure access.

In summary, sustainable management is a lot easier to introduce if there is secure access to resources. Consequently, land tenure must involve inclusive and participatory approaches, especially at the assessment stage, (prior to projects) and tools, such as mapping, for easier decision-making. Tenure rights, regardless of form, must be identified and secured. A range of rights (property titles, customary rights and indigenous laws) should be acknowledged beforehand rather than replacing some of them with others. Finally, cooperation on various uses of the same land must be encouraged to restrict fragmentation and target producing gains from them in the collective interest. Conflict resolution mechanisms should be introduced, drawing from existing examples locally and by avoiding overlaps.

- Water management -

The availability of water is a major outcome of desertification, yet curiously, this link is very seldom tackled.

Approaches to deal with desertification are often agronomic, or tied more generally to development issues. However, there are many uses for water which occur at different levels. The most obvious uses, but which do not consume the largest volumes, are those linked to domestic sanitary needs, small-scale farming and cottage industries. Yet, the biggest uses are linked to irrigated agriculture and industry. How can competition between the various uses of water be managed given its precarious availability?

There is a need for greater understanding and monitoring of available resources, both on a large and a small scale, and for this information to be made available and shared between a range of stakeholders, including communities. The advantage of developing multi-stakeholder and user consultation frameworks to devise rules to manage, use and maintain water resources, and respect those rules, is key. Water does not stop at inter or intra administrative borders, so there was also a recommendation to give greater consideration to the scale of spatial management and sector-based boundaries by usage. Water managers are water professionals who must consider other dimensions, such as social, social-economic aspects. These often ensure the success of actions if we take them into account.

- Migration -

The issue of migration is closely tied to climate change as well as resulting desertification and insecurity. According to the IDMC, the main causes of migration are floods and storms, well before armed conflicts. However, broadly speaking, migration has historically been an adaptation strategy for an environment that has become too problematic, acting primarily at a national or regional level. Behind the economic causes, hide numerous other reasons, such as climate and deteriorating natural resources, including water and land. All of them converge to alarmingly fuel the numbers of displaced people.

Urgent action must therefore be taken in the places where people leave and arrive. This involves capacity building in host communities where people arrive and developing activities to protect and share the natural resources in vulnerable departure areas. Consulting target populations appears to be a vital lever for action to introduce effective migration policies that include cultural diversity.



- 4 per 1000 Initiative -

The 4 per 1000 Initiative was launched in France prior to the COP21. It brings together voluntary sector stakeholders of all types in the Action Agenda and seeks to demonstrate that the right land management can jointly benefit food security and climate change. The recommended approach is a holistic one, based on the close links between climate, land restoration and agriculture. The 4 per 1000 Initiative, is not an end in itself, but forms a frame of reference and fits into the UNCCD agreement. Although in the spotlight at present, research is not the sole objective, but rather in situ action.

In this initiative, civil society and research have common challenges, either to develop benchmarks or a common vision and deliver action plans. As concerns soil and livelihoods, the workshop emphasised that projects should keep a close eye on human dignity, soil preservation and take into account the SDGs. Firstly, small-scale and family farming must be protected, then good practice and successes must be rolled out. This initiative won the 2017 Future Policy Award, which rewards the best land restoration policies.



- Sustainable Oases Initiative -

Only recently have oases systems featured at international and national fora, in discussions on sustainable land management, adapting to climate change, or biodiversity. Yet, these systems are a model for adapting to extreme conditions and are, in a certain way, indicators in environments vulnerable to land degradation. Currently, oases are subject to pressures that are endangering them. It is important to make them appealing when conserving them, especially to keep young people in oases, by providing them with decent surroundings and opportunities to develop their plans for the future.

Research activities and specialist networks must be encouraged, strengthened and maintained, to prospect for actions and deliver consistency through predictable and long-term funding, in the sense that "you have to know one to see one". Acquiring and disseminating knowledge, particularly traditional know-how, is still a key element for the grass-roots component of projects and several initiatives are ongoing in this area, especially in the Maghreb, with the Sustainable Oases Initiative, or the Oases Associations Network (RADD0). These must absolutely be supported!

- Decentralised cooperation -

Decentralised cooperation means cooperation between local authorities, often North-South cooperation. Few cooperative ventures consider sustainable land management and those focusing on agriculture are all too rare.

Discussions stressed the need to boost decentralised cooperation in sustainable land management. It was also stated that a local authority cannot act alone and must be supported on both sides by organised civil society and the technical expertise from the diaspora. The basic premise to run a decentralised cooperation activity is proper and effective decentralisation. Several obstacles to developing decentralised cooperation were identified. These included, funding, implementation periods, technical capacity in management and political will in the long-term. In parallel, numerous solutions were proposed, such as the need for a preliminary analysis, including civil society prior to the start of the project, optimising rural-urban links and grasping the key sustainable development issues. This is a development model brimming with opportunities for sustainable land management!



- Energy -

Cutting energy consumption and carbon emissions is a key priority to combat climate change and desertification.

This workshop identified prerequisites for undertaking any work on wood-energy, such as the need to carry out a proper assessment of the wood sector prior to starting any action, or including industrial considerations and not to focus solely on domestic uses. There must be a centralised approach for income-generating activities to forge the link between domestic and industrial levels and to facilitate the dissemination of techniques. Finally, action must be taken in the sector as a whole, to firstly address women, who are generally responsible for purchasing or collecting charcoal, as well as cooking. There is an urgent need to address a crucial lack of data, in terms of the quality of information on this sector, such as the traceability of wood resources.



- Great Green Wall -

The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel initiative (GGWSSI) was launched in 2015 at a Summit attended by the Heads of State of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (Cen-Sad). It is based on introducing a patchwork of projects, combining the combat against land degradation and poverty, on both the north and south sides of the

Sahara Desert. This initiative is remarkable given its size and ambition, in a vulnerable region, as it must resolve numerous African challenges that overlap within the areas concerned. A coordinated strategy has been developed, but governance remains complex and action still insignificant regarding the enormous challenges.

Capacity-building activities are both necessary and useful for its implementation and should be undertaken through multi-stakeholder partnerships. There must be greater organised civil society involvement through a partnership programme. Civil society has an important role to play, especially in bringing stakeholders closer together, as promoted in certain ongoing projects presented at the workshop. The success of this big political initiative will be its grass-roots implementation in the regions! It remains to be seen how activities from this initiative can be promoted outside the political framework, but which nevertheless contribute to achieving its goals!



- Women, access and rights to land -

Women do not have equal access to land ownership in many countries throughout the world. Access to fertile land is restricted by socio-cultural practices that reinforce control by men. Yet, women strive to adapt themselves and deal with their surroundings to secure their economic independence, especially through their in-depth knowledge of the land and the relationship they maintain with it. They have sustainably managed their environment for generations.

The workshop developed thoughts about the way in which ancestral knowledge can become tools to combat climate change and how protecting this knowledge, women's rights and indigenous people can be bolstered to benefit areas threatened by desertification and the communities living there.





A declaration to defend and pass on ! A call for signatures

The Désertif'actions 2017 summit concluded with a declaration unanimously adopted in the closing plenary session on Wednesday 28 June, in Strasbourg, France.

The Désertif'actions organisers ask you to **support this declaration by adding the signature of your organisation to it** and by passing it on in your own networks. To do this, we kindly ask you to send an email to association@climatechance.fr, indicating the name of your organisation and the name of a contact person. The more and varied the signatures, the more influence this declaration (the only one giving a common voice to non-State actors) will have when presented at the two UN summits.

Désertif'actions : land at the heart of the agenda !

Various stakeholder groups involved in combatting land degradation and climate change came together for two days, at the University of Strasbourg for Désertif'actions 2017. They adopted a declaration on Wednesday 28 June 2017, reiterating their determination to place land at the centre of local actions and international agendas.

Unique by its very nature, this multi-stakeholder gathering brought together 200 participants from some thirty countries to develop a lasting dialogue between stakeholder communities involved in combatting land degradation and climate change.

Numerous points of convergence and synergies were identified, sketching out a roadmap for actions to be delivered on the ground and political messages to take to upcoming international meetings, such as the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, at Ordos, in China (COP13), in September, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Bonn, Germany (COP23), in November.

The full declaration is available at www.desertif-actions.fr/en

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Désertif'actions 2017 is an event organized jointly by CARI association, Climate Chance, the city of Strasbourg, with the support of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

