

DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT DAY 2021 17 JUNE 2021



Desertification and Drought Day was officially declared by the UN General Assembly as “World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought” (The resolution A/RES/49/115). The objectives of Desertification and Drought Day are:

- To promote public awareness of the issue
- To let people know that desertification and drought can be effectively tackled, that solutions are possible, and that key tools to this aim lay in strengthened community participation and cooperation at all levels.
- To strengthen implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

Globally, 23 per cent of the land is no longer productive. 75 per cent has been transformed from its natural state, mostly for agriculture. This transformation in land use is happening at a faster rate than at any other time in human history, and has accelerated over the last 50 years.

Across the globe, calls have been growing for a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Such a green recovery would create resilient economies. It would spark strong and urgent action on climate change. It would reverse the loss of nature and biodiversity that is eating away at the foundations of human existence and increasing the risk of future pandemics. This may seem like a big task, but there is one approach that can help to solve all of the problems at once: restoring degraded land. Restoring degraded land creates jobs and raises income levels. It increases food security. It takes carbon out of the atmosphere, slowing climate change. It brings back biodiversity. It protects against the impacts of climate change. With trillions of dollars being put into pandemic recovery, and restoration commitments covering almost 1 billion hectares already in place as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration gets underway, we have a real chance to build back better with healthy land.

The goal of the 2021 Desertification and Drought Day (DDD) is to demonstrate that investing in healthy land as part of a green recovery is a smart economic decision – not just in terms of creating jobs and rebuilding livelihoods, but in terms of insulating economies from future crises caused by climate change and nature loss, and accelerating progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. By doing so, DDD aims to drive actions to protect and restore natural ecosystems as we recover from COVID-19.

The land is the basis of our food, feed and fibre production systems. It is home to a vast part of the global biodiversity and provides ecosystem services such as clean water, air and climate regulation. But growing demand for these goods, combined with expanding

cities and infrastructure, is rapidly encroaching upon nature and its support to people. As land degrades and becomes unproductive, natural areas are cleared and converted. This means more greenhouse gas emissions and less biodiversity. It also means fewer wild spaces that serve as a buffer to zoonoses such as COVID-19 and protect from extreme climate events such as droughts, floods, sand and dust storms. Evidence shows that the economic crisis caused by COVID-19 restriction measures led to the loosening of environmental standards and regulations for companies and industries in some countries to pursue quick economic recovery.

Investing in land restoration creates jobs and generates economic benefits, providing livelihoods at a time when hundreds of millions of jobs are being lost. Land-based restoration is particularly helpful for women and youth, who tend to be marginalized in times of crisis. Innovative restoration approaches could not only bring young job seekers back to their communities but also reduce workloads. For example, women, especially in developing nations, are strongly represented in agricultural production and land management and are often responsible for meeting the basic nutritional needs of their families. They have much to gain from the increased productivity of restored lands, and often have knowledge that can be used to increase the success of restoration projects.

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration will support initiatives that provide entrepreneurial youths working in ecosystem restoration with the tools they need to succeed. Investing in land restoration also boosts food security. Restoring forests, wetlands and other ecosystems mitigates against climate change and restores nature's defences against disasters and extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and sand and dust storms. It provides a natural buffer against zoonotic diseases. Between now and 2030, it is estimated that the restoration of 350 million hectares of degraded ecosystems could remove up to 26 gigatons of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere – close to almost half of what the world emitted in 2019 – and return USD 9 trillion in ecosystem services.⁸ The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, which starts this year, is an opportunity to ramp up and scale out these efforts to prevent, halt, and reverse the loss and degradation of ecosystems worldwide. The UNCCD is therefore calling on all members of the global community to treat the land as a limited and precious natural capital, prioritize its health in the pandemic recovery and push hard to restore the land during the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Everyone has a role to play because everyone has a stake in the future.

The COVID19 pandemic has reinforced just how much we need our forests, dry lands, wetlands and other land ecosystems: for food, for the green economy, for eco-tourism, as a buffer against extreme climate events. In Costa Rica, our unique tropical forests are a limited and precious natural resource that we cannot neglect. On Desertification and Drought Day, I urge us all to push hard to restore our lands. We all have a role to play, because we all have a stake in our planet's future.— Andrea Meza, Minister of Environment and Energy of Costa Rica

