

**Message of Monique Barbut**  
**Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification**  
**On the occasion of World Day to Combat Desertification**  
**17 June 2015**

When a plate of food is served in front of you, what comes to mind? Few of us actually think about it, but it is the endpoint of a long and complex process. As we bite down, we hardly think about the rice stalks in the fields, the animals grazing or the potatoes in the ground. Nor do we stretch our minds to the land that sustains all life and health.

The land nourishes the grains, legumes, vines and trees. Without it, there is only an empty plate. The land is a dense mass of life-giving soil carbon, water and billions of organisms. To feed generations gone by, we have cleared 70% of its grasslands, 50% of the savannahs and 45% of its temperate forest. We treat these resources like disposable goods. We degrade the land through unsustainable farming and walk away when it cannot produce anymore.

Today, one third of previously fertile farmland lies abandoned. With a population of 9.6 billion expected by 2050, we will need to clear 3 million hectares of new land every year, on average. We are heading towards a tipping point.

Sustainable land management (SLM) and actions to reclaim degraded land can strengthen the foundation of food security. They restore and maintain the carbon, water and organisms in the land and soil that are crucial for plant health.

Some fear a move to SLM, because they think it causes lower yields. On the contrary, SLM practices used in parts of Burkina Faso increased harvests by four times. The water table rose by nearly 10 meters. Spreading sustainable land use practices on a large-scale in China's Loess Plateau resulted in nearly double the grain production. Plus, we can rely on sustainable farming indefinitely – it is not weakening the foundations.

Spreading sustainable land use practices and restoring the land is not up to the world's farmers alone. We all have a role in it. At the very least, we need to ensure they are earning enough from what they produce to invest back into the land to keep it fertile into the future.

The post-2015 development agenda is just around the corner. This September, countries will decide on the priorities for sustainable development. Land and its sustainable management are included, and need to be at the forefront of countries' priorities. The UNCCD is developing the goal of Land Degradation Neutrality to promote actions that will enable us, as a global community to get to the point where we are not losing more fertile land than we are reclaiming back to health.

Sustainable development depends on having a solid foundation of food and water security. Let's think about where our lunches come from, and campaign for fertile land.

On this World Day to Combat Desertification, join the UNCCD's actions to recover all the degraded land we can. We are working with a growing force of communities, NGOs, business and governments committed to becoming the generation of sustainable land stewards. For every meal, you must pay the bill. Let's invest enough so we can all eat.

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