

2010 World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD)

A Concept Note for the Side Event

25 September 2009

1:15pm, Hilton Hotel, Buenos Aires

Enhancing soils anywhere enhances life everywhere

I: Objectives of the Side Event

The side event is planned with two outcomes in mind.

The purpose of the side event is to interest and enlist the involvement of COP 9 participants in organizing events to mark the 2010 World Day to Combat Desertification. The secretariat is interested in setting up a network of such participants to enhance solidarity and information sharing in the lead up to this event.

Second, the side event is designed as an opportunity for participants to share information on the kinds of activities that should be undertaken and ways to promote the theme of the WDCD, and to explore the possibility of organizing a sustained six-month campaign that would peak on WDCD and conclude at the end of that month.

This is an opportunity to explore, share and consider ways to make the 2010 WDCD innovative, exceptional and successful awareness raising and public mobilization opportunities.

Come reflect with us!

II. Background

The World Day to Combat Desertification is celebrated every year on 17 June to mark the date that the Convention was adopted in Paris, France, in 1994. The World Day to Combat Desertification is observed with a view to raise awareness about the Convention, its concerns and activities.

The United Nations designated 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity. The secretariat of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification has accepted the invitation from the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to dedicate the observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification in 2010 to issues relevant to biological diversity. This approach strengthens the synergy called for among the three sister Rio Conventions on biological diversity, climate change and combating desertification.

III: Theme

Over the next ten years, the secretariat and parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will promote practices that support sustainable land management as a response to desertification/land degradation and to mitigating the effects of drought. Sustainable land management emphasizes paying attention to water availability, recovery of soil fertility and low-carbon emission all at the same time, in land management.

Over the last thirty years, governments have collaborated in efforts to curb desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and minimize the onset of drought. However, the value of soil health and its management have been viewed as national responsibilities with little global benefit. For the 2010 WDCD, two topics are planned.

There will be a focus on soil biodiversity (mainly soil biota) as one approach to the issue of DLDD and biodiversity. Soil organisms contribute a wide range of essential services for the sustainable functioning of all ecosystems. They are the primary driving agents of nutrient cycling, regulating the dynamics of soil organic matter, soil carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission. They also modify the soil's physical structure and water regimes, enhancing the amount and efficiency of nutrient acquisition by the vegetation, and of plant health. The diversity of ecosystems is also based on soil diversity. In this regard, the conservation of soils amounts to preserving the basis for diversity of life. WDCD campaigns could focus on one or all of these aspects of soil biota.

The second approach will focus on the benefits from the preservation of soil and its biodiversity, that is, the global benefits of soils. There is limited public appreciation at the global level about the global benefits of soils. By promoting the benefits of soils and strengthening awareness of the socio-economic¹ and environmental values² of soil we can send a strong message to the public that DLDD presents both challenges and opportunities for them.

IV: Activities up to 2010 WDCD - what's in it for you and for others?

General Assembly resolution on WDCD invites all States, relevant United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations to devote the World Day to promoting public awareness through a variety of means.

During this side-event session, innovative means to engage in all relevant stakeholders from the early stage of the World Day observance preparation process is sought so that the process itself becomes part of awareness raising opportunities.

Consistent with the Comprehensive Communication Strategy work plan, appropriate activities will be developed for the various target groups following these two approaches. The slogan will be translated into custom tailored message to each target group. This could be done, for example, through the elaboration of info sheets (one pager) on the same topic for different groups with different emphases. Other examples on activities could include: promotional video clip, the 2010 WDCD logo competition, involving educational TV channels.

¹ Refers to the economic opportunities such as "payment for environmental services" (PES) or soil carbon and the benefits of investing in SLM.

² This would refer for example to of mitigation/adaptation to climate change.