

Healthy soil sustains your life  
LET'S GO LAND-DEGRADATION NEUTRAL



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**WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION**  
**Sunday, 17 June 2012**

**Introduction: The Road to Rio Plus 20**

The world's most significant non-renewable resource is fertile soil, which is the peel of productive land. Nevertheless, each year 12 million ha of land, the area three times the size of Switzerland, are lost due to desertification. Land degradation directly affects 1.5 billion people globally.

Soil is key for securing water, energy and building resilience to climate change. Therefore, the international community needs to take urgent action in order to avoid the increasing loss of land. To this end, this year's World Day to Combat Desertification, celebrated on 17 June, will highlight the efforts required to secure the long-term sustainable land management.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is one of the three sister-Rio Conventions, along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. These are the three legally-binding outputs of the Earth Summit, which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. The UNCCD promotes a global response to desertification, land degradation and drought. The Convention addresses specifically the drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) will take place on 20-22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro. It aims to secure renewed political commitment for green economy and sustainable development, to assess the current progress and to address new and emerging challenges.

**Thematic Focus: Becoming Land-Degradation Neutral**

In September 2011, the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on "Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication" brought together political leaders from across the world. Many of them stressed that the commitment to build a land degradation neutral world would be an important outcome for Rio+20. Therefore, the theme for the 2012 World Day to Combat Desertification is land-degradation neutrality.

Zero-net land degradation (ZNLN) can be achieved when, over a given period of time, non-degraded land remains healthy, and already degraded-land is restored. Towards Rio+20, the UNCCD will provide an analysis of the possible implications and impacts of this target for policy-makers. This approach will enable global community to identify investment opportunities, which will help to avoid land degradation and to benefit from the sustainable land-use.



### **Objectives: Target-setting and Visibility**

The significance of land and soil to humanity remains obscure to many. The risk to livelihoods emanating from land degradation does not receive the deserved attention. Political leaders during the aforementioned UN General Assembly High-level Meeting stressed the need for a sustainable development goal on land with targets, which would lead to a land-degradation neutral world.

Nearly half of the world's food production systems are supported by drylands. Accounting for more than 40 percent of the world land mass, drylands are home to one third of the world population. Despite water scarcity, conflict-proneness and economic hardships, drylands are key to supporting the habitats, crops and livestock that sustain the entire global population.

Sustaining healthy soil and restoring degraded land in drylands can ensure food security, alleviate rural poverty and hunger and build resistance to major environmental challenges. Successful practices for attaining the zero-net land degradation in drylands could be then effectively adapted and adopted in non-drylands. In turn, setting the ZNLD target globally will contribute to building the resilience of dry and non-dry lands and enable the successful achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, climate change adaption and mitigation and biodiversity preservation.

In this light, the specific objectives of the 2012 World Day to Combat Desertification are to:

- **Popularize the idea of becoming land-degradation neutral** by setting the target of zero-net land degradation. "Becoming land-degradation neutral" entails preventing healthy soils from improper exploitation and restoring natural fertility of soils to a sufficient scale.
- **Promote the observance event on 17 June 2012 in every country** as well as at regional and global levels in order to raise public awareness about the benefits of the zero-net land degradation target for sustainable development and green economy.
- **Promote actions and exchanges among stakeholders** in the lead up to the 2012 WDCD and in the longer-term for the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010-2020).

### **Tagline (Slogan)**

The slogan for this year's World Day to Combat Desertification is:

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This slogan is both about "the future YOU want" and "YOU make it happen". The notions of healthy soil and sustainability of life need to be embedded in the green economy and poverty eradication - two key elements of the Rio+20 Conference. The main aim of the campaign is to promote the "zero-net land degradation" as an outcome, which can be achieved by collective effort at global level.

Speaking of "healthy soil" enables us to rise above debates that divide those, who are in favor of mechanized and chemical approaches and those, who uphold organic processes. It fits in the context of the global moves towards a green economy.

### **The Global Observance: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

The 2012 World Day to Combat Desertification takes place in the midst of a flurry of environmental activities. It will be held three days before the start of the Rio+20 Conference in Brazil and on the weekend following the last Rio+20 Preparatory Committee meeting in Rio (13-15 June). The global observance of the WDCD is planned at a venue of the Rio+20 Conference.

