

**Joint Statement of the Global Environment Facility and
the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
on the Occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification**

This year marks the 15th anniversary since the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994. To date, 193 countries have signed and ratified the Convention, demonstrating a universal commitment to address land degradation as a global challenge affecting 1.2 billion people. This challenge is exacerbated by the growing threat of global climate change, reinforcing the urgency to address natural resource management as a priority area for investments in both mitigation and adaptation.

In order to improve the conditions of affected populations and ecosystems, as well as mobilize sufficient resources for the Convention's implementation work and generate global benefits, the parties to the Convention adopted the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention for the period 2008-2018 during the eighth session held in 2007. Sustainable land management is a key component of this new agenda, and is geared towards the conservation of land and water.

As a financing instrument of the Convention, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) contributes directly to objectives of the UNCCD. By working together, the GEF and UNCCD will support countries in their efforts to develop and implement activities in accordance with objectives of the Convention. The new framework allows the GEF to link its investments for combating desertification to the priority areas in the 10-year strategy.

During its current Fourth replenishment phase (2006-2010), the GEF allocated \$300 million to combating land degradation, of which \$150 million was committed to the TerrAfrica Partnership Platform for a Strategic Investment Program in Sustainable Land Management in Sub Saharan Africa (SIP). Working together with UNCCD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and GEF Agencies, the SIP/TerrAfrica initiative has leveraged more than \$800 million in co-financing to support 40 projects in 25 countries. The GEF contribution will enable an effectively coordinated and integrated approach to implementing policy, investment and knowledge innovations in sustainable land management for improved livelihoods and global environmental benefits. The GEF is also supporting countries in South Asia, Latin America, and Central Europe to implement integrated approaches to combating land degradation.

As a critical step towards building a strong foundation for implementing the new strategy, the GEF and UNCCD have agreed to develop a 7.5 million project to support countries to meet their obligations to the Convention. The project, implemented in collaboration with UNEP/GEF, will assist Parties to the UNCCD to set up or strengthen national monitoring and assessment systems, enabling them to report back to the COP on the status of implementation of their NAPs in the context of their national sustainable development objectives. The project will impact the work undertaken by Parties to align their action programmes, and therefore constitutes one of the foundations for ensuring implementation of The Strategy and of the Convention.

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“The assistance from the GEF would allow countries to initiate establishing and/or improving national monitoring and assessment systems and this will be seen in the light of a more sustained commitment by the GEF towards an adequate monitoring of UNCCD implementation that ideally would also benefit other Rio processes,” said Monique Barbut, CEO and Chairperson of the GEF.

“The paradigm shift initiated at country level through support by the GEF will not only cater to the needs of observation requirements of the UNCCD, but also open the way for synergistic implementation and monitoring of Rio Conventions with a view to alleviate reporting burdens, particularly in countries with human capacity constraints,” says Luc Gnacadja, UNCCD Executive Secretary, about the initiative, adding that “it is a cutting edge initiative that hopefully will resonate with secretariats of the sister Conventions and provide a good basis for concrete cooperation that will benefit ecosystems throughout the world.”

In recognition of the additional financial burden affected developing countries that are parties to the UNCCD may have to carry to address the effects of climate change, the UNCCD is also exploring avenues through which affected parties, particularly poor countries that are adversely affected by the climate change, may access additional resources through mechanisms such as GEF. This is urgent in light of the financial crisis that may further undercut developed countries ability to provide traditional development assistance.

The allocation of over 70 percent of the world’s freshwater resources to agriculture and water sharing among catchment and downs stream countries are recognized as potential national security challenges. To these inter-state challenges drylands countries face intra-state challenges associated with water scarcity, soil salinity and growing incidences of wild fires. Given the significance of water in sustainable land management and potential for conflict, the UNCCD is developing a water policy to guide its work during the current phase of the strategy.

Joint action between UNCCD and the GEF will remain crucial for supporting efforts to prevent, control and reverse desertification/land degradation in the context of poverty reduction and sustainable development, and contribute towards securing our common security.

In preparing Focal Area strategies for its Fifth replenishment, the GEF specifically emphasized alignment of Land Degradation priorities with the 10-year UNCCD strategy. As a result, the UNCCD has called for a robust replenishment of the focal area to enable increased investment in implementation of the Convention by Parties. The GEF and UNCCD also call for increased recognition of an integrated approach with other Rio conventions considering the reciprocal effects of land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss.

About the GEF

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The GEF unites 178 countries in partnership with international institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector to address global environmental issues while supporting national sustainable development initiatives. Today the GEF is the largest funder of projects to improve the global environment. An independent financial organization, the GEF provides grants for projects related to biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, the ozone layer, and persistent organic pollutants.

Since 1991, GEF has achieved a strong track record with developing countries and countries with economies in transition, providing \$8.6 billion in grants and leveraging \$36.1 billion in co-financing for more than 2,400 projects in over 165 countries.

About the UNCCD

Developed as a result of the Rio Summit, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a unique instrument that has brought attention to land degradation to some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and people in the world. Thirteen years after coming into force, the UNCCD benefits from the largest membership of the three Rio Conventions and is increasingly recognized as an instrument that can make an important contribution to the achievement of sustainable development and poverty reduction.