



Message from President Tarja Halonen, UNCCD Drylands Ambassador

Land is the foundation of life and human well-being. It provides us with food, water and energy as well as employment and livelihoods. Fertile soil is the prerequisite for economic, social and ecological sustainability. Yet the pace of land degradation is increasing, bringing drastic changes to our way of life and weakening the efforts to combat hunger, thirst and inequality. Globally, 52% of the agricultural land is moderately or severely degraded, but only 16% of the degraded land is recovering.

The 2015 World Day to Combat Desertification focuses on food security. The link between sustainable land practices and sustainable food systems is obvious. Land degradation and desertification pose major threats to global food production and population growth will set further demands to the productive capacity of the land. In 2030, people will need 45% more food and 30% more water. This means that we must urgently change in our land use practices. We must act to recover degraded land for agriculture and pasture. Investing in the soil will promote food and nutrition security and also effectively support the eradication of poverty and combating climate change.

The empowerment of women is vital in providing sustainable land management solutions. The majority of the world's poor are women. Also, the majority of the agricultural labor force and small farmers are women and, on a global scale, they produce over half of the food that is grown. Women must be included in the planning and implementing of the agricultural extension. They must be ensured equal access to the financial resources and their needs have to be taken in to account in technology development. It is particularly important to secure the right of women and girls to own and inherit land.

Combatting desertification and reversing land degradation can play a significant role in supporting the stability of societies and strengthening global peace. Today, many conflicts are about the control of natural resources. Severe food and water scarcity can lead to environmentally forced migration and increase the chance of conflict. We have the tools and methods to manage our land in sustainable ways, now it is time to make sustainable practices the norm. The civil society actors have a vital role to play in advancing the change.

At the Rio+20 Conference, the Governments committed to strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world in the context of the sustainable development. In September this year, the global community will agree on a new sustainable development agenda. This will give us an opportunity to commit ourselves to land degradation neutrality and to continue working together for healthy and productive land.

I wish you all a successful World Day to Combat Desertification.

Tarja Halonen
UNCCD Drylands Ambassador
Former President of Finland