Press release World Day to Combat Desertification / Friday 16 June, Cali, Colombia

Food security depends on productive crop and pasture land. Yet these are increasingly threatened by challenges including climate change, land degradation and competition over limited resources. Currently over half of the land used for agriculture worldwide is moderately or severely affected by land degradation – seriously affecting the livelihoods of millions of farmers and our ability to feed the world’s urban and rural populations.

Finding sustainable solutions to these kinds of challenges is the focus of World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) – a global network of practitioners, researchers and policymakers dealing with agriculture and natural resources. It has already built up an extensive knowledge base, including 1,200 success stories from over 120 countries that showcase best practices for boosting food production while protecting the natural resource base and ecosystem services.

In addition, WOCAT provides a robust set of tools and methods for assessing, documenting and sharing SLM technologies and approaches that have been developed with partners in countries over 25 years. These are made available through a global knowledge platform on SLM technologies and approaches that is recognized by the United Nations Convention to Combat Drought and Desertification (UNCCD) as the primary recommended database for SLM best practices.

WOCAT members met in Cali, Colombia this week – in advance of the UN’s World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (17th June) - and identified ways to share and build on these successes on farm and in the wider landscape. These specifically relate to:

- Restoring water flow and quality in rivers, and recharging groundwater storage
- Reducing soil erosion and enhancing the productive capacity of the land
- Increasing biomass for energy and fodder, while replenishing soil organic carbon
- Diversifying farming systems for reliable yields and better nutrition.

These successes show how sustainable land management enables land users and rural communities to cope with climate change while providing viable livelihoods and reduced exposure to natural disasters. Participants during the meeting visited a farmer near Santander de Quilichao in Colombia’s Cauca Department where, over a period of ten years, a range of SLM practices have been combined to boost production of pineapple, sugarcane and cattle, while also helping to restore soil, water and biodiversity in the wider landscape.
For example:
- Hailu Habtamu from Ministry of Agriculture and Kifle Woldearegay Woldemariam from Mekelle University noted that “support by the Government of Ethiopia in promoting SLM Technologies and Approaches that were evaluated with local actors and shared through WOCAT, enabled some 500,000 ha in 135 community watersheds in 6 regions to be brought under sustainable and climate smart land management, restoring 60,000 ha of productive land and forestry”.
- Cambodia has documented over 20 SLM technologies using the WOCAT tools and trained many agricultural extension workers about WOCAT tools and methods for sustainable land management and Tim Sophea, Royal University of Agriculture, further believes that “the knowledge and experiences in scaling up good practices are directly contributing to SDG goals of the country”.
- In Cuba, Armando Jesus de la Colina Rodrigues, Instituto de Geografía Tropical, highlighted that “the set of tools for evaluating and mapping land degradation and SLM practices was instrumental in planning and decision making for the transition from large scale production of sugarcane by cooperatives to diverse and productive smallholder food systems”.

To help address the global environmental and food security challenges outlined in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, the WOCAT meeting discussed ways to facilitate wider use of available tools and methods and enable SLM successes to be widely adopted in all countries, from the world’s drylands to humid tropical areas, lowlands to highlands, and for farmers and other users of natural resources. In particular, WOCAT members’ highlighted ways in which SLM is critical for achieving SDG targets on land degradation neutrality (15.3); water use efficiency and water stress (6.4), ensuring sustainable food production systems and implementing resilient agricultural practices (2.4); and strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters (13).

*The WOCAT consortium comprises seven research-and-development and academic organisations, including: FAO, SDC, GIZ, ICARDA, CIAT, ICIMOD and CDE/University of Bern. The aim is to bring knowledge and experience together to support a range of in-country SLM actors to enhance decision making from local to national level, for sustainable, efficient and productive land use. The 2017 meeting – the first in Latin America - was held at CIAT’s headquarters in Cali, Colombia, from 12-18th June. It was supported by the Centre for Environment and Development of the University of Bern (WOCAT secretariat), and FAO. Participants from 25 countries represented consortium partners and diverse institutions, including UNCCD national focal points, agricultural and environmental ministries, universities, NGOs and shared experiences from several SLM projects on the ground and national programmes.

For more information see the SLM database [https://qcat.wocat.net](https://qcat.wocat.net)