

3100 million hectares of rangelands;
335 million hectares of rain-fed croplands;
40 million hectares of irrigated farmlands.

The 1983 assessment confirmed the 1977 estimate that the world was losing on average an estimated 6 million hectares of productive land each year, desertified. It added that each year some 21 million hectares of productive land were being reduced to a state of zero or negative economic returns.

The Editors would like to emphasize that in the three reports covered in this presentation the political reality of today's climate of recession, growing unemployment, financial uncertainty, exchange rate fluctuations and, above all, the reluctance of many of the principal donors to allocate increased funds for international programmes was not ignored or minimized. But the experts and specialists were working on the hypothesis that enlightened self-interest would indicate that major environmental hazards, such as desertification, affected, through multiplier effects, the interests of all countries. Secondly, they were attempting to identify an armory of weapons that may be employed when the political will emerges so that new modalities or sources of funding are not excluded from consideration simply because their early adoption, in the present climate of opinion, appears unlikely. Thirdly, the experts had made no *a priori* assumptions regarding the ushering in of a World Government with powers of international taxation: the international revenue taxes and other levies examined are situated in the context of the existing international political order.

Nairobi

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Notes

- 1 See Eleanor B. Steinberg and Joseph A. Yager with Gerard M. Brannon, *New Means of Financing International Needs* (Washington, DC, Brookings Institution, 1978).
- 2 This figure applies only to the cost of halting the further spread of deserts and not to the cost of reclamation of land which has already undergone desertification over the years.

Editors' Notes and Acknowledgments

The present study consists essentially of three United Nations reports prepared by groups of high-level specialists in international financing convened by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme. The three groups met at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on 13–16 March 1978 and at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 21–25 July 1980 and 20–24 July 1981. The reports were presented to the United Nations General Assembly in documents A/33/260 of 6 October 1978, A/35/396 annex of 17 September 1980 and A/36/141 of 1 October 1981 respectively.

The distinguished specialists who participated in the three expert groups are listed in annexes to each of the three studies. Some of them participated in one meeting only, others in more, but all of them, serving in their personal capacities, made substantive contributions in terms of identification and evaluation of innovative ideas and concepts of financing. The three studies constitute a noteworthy tribute to their dedication and effort.

The Executive Director of UNEP, Dr Mostafa K. Tolba, attended each of the three meetings and served at once as the co-ordinator of the entire programme and catalyst of innovative ideas. The three studies bear his personal mark throughout.

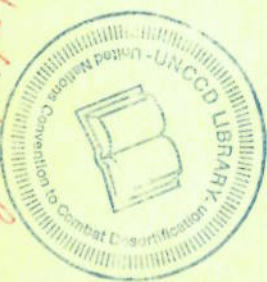
Several UNEP staff members also serviced the groups at their different meetings with data, information and analytical work which proved useful in the final preparation of the studies. The contribution of Mr Reuben Mendez of UNSO to the work of the first two groups was valuable and substantive and the editors wish to express their particular gratitude to him.

Acknowledgements of debt are also due to research personnel who worked behind the scenes in collating, collecting and checking diverse financial modalities and their practicability.

The successive drafts of the book were processed by Ms Betty Kiru, Ms Gillian Mayers and Ms Jane Maina with great care and attention and to them we are very grateful.

Nairobi, August 1986

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Historical
collection

(ii) The detailed modalities of obtaining resources on a concessionary basis;

(iii) A full feasibility study and working plan for the establishment of an independent operational financial corporation for the financing of desertification projects;

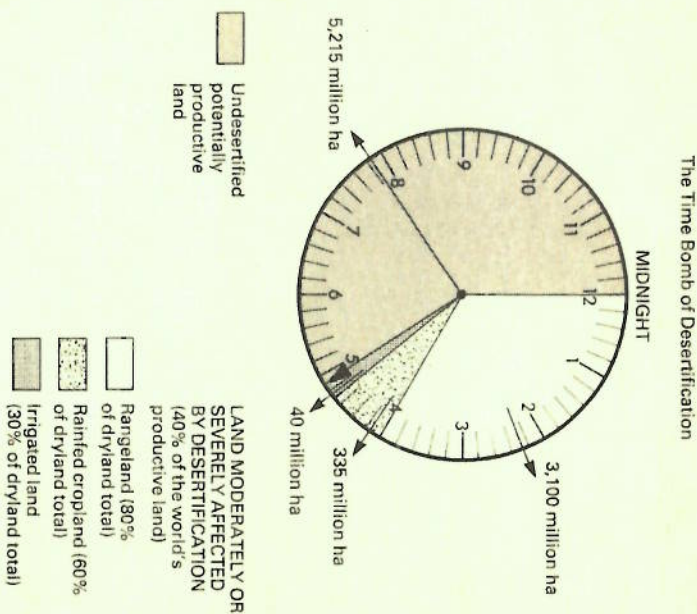
(b) To report on the results of the above-mentioned studies to the General Assembly at its Thirty-Sixth Session.'

The study, which was prepared by a group of high-level specialists in international financing who met in Geneva on 20–24 July 1981, was presented to the General Assembly. The study is contained in Part III, and it includes the feasibility study for the establishment of an international financial corporation for financing of desertification projects.

The General Assembly has since requested comments of the member Governments on the Report of the Secretary General and an indication as to whether the recommendations are acceptable. At the Fortieth Session of the General Assembly in 1985, the third report on the response of the Member Governments was submitted. The Reporters stated that 'there seems to be no general support for the series of measures for providing additional resources needed for financing the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification as outlined in the three expert studies. The General Assembly may, however, consider that the innovative approaches and modalities embodied in the three expert studies deserve further consideration. A small group with a more closely focused perception may be better able to perform this task. The Consultative Group for Desertification Control, established by the General Assembly in resolution 32/172 of 19 December 1977, could be asked to do so with a view to the creation of practical and effective means for the early financing of the implementation of the Plan of Action, with particular emphasis on the feasibility of establishing an international financial corporation for that purpose.'

It will be recognized that the different studies prepared by experts and reports submitted to the General Assembly are part of a continuum: a continuing search for an acceptable and viable solution to the problem of financing the Plan of Action including proposals for practicable sources of funding which originated during UNCOD and were later discussed by the General Assembly at its thirty-second and almost every subsequent session.

No solutions are yet in sight although the present crisis in Africa indicates that we are reaching a point when synergistic, and perhaps irreversible, forces are coming into play and the 'Time Bomb of Desertification' is nearing its point of explosion.



The clock is ticking, an environmental time bomb. It is now 4:48 p.m. At the rate of 22 million hectares lost a year to the desert or to zero economic productivity, in a little less than 200 years at the current rate of desertification there will not be a single, 'fully productive hectare of land on earth. It will be the earth's midnight. We can expect the rate to increase as less land is exploited by more people. We can also be sure that a major socio-economic catastrophe of cataclysmic proportions would engulf the earth long before the last hectare succumbed. We are already feeling the first tremors of that catastrophe.

In 1983 the United Nations Environment Programme carried out a new assessment of the global dimensions of desertification as compared to an earlier assessment that was submitted to UNCOD in 1977. The new assessment showed that desertification-prone areas were not confined to arid and semi-arid regions and that extensive stretches of sub-humid tropics were threatened. The total areas prone to desertification covered 4,500 million hectares (35% of the Earth's land surface), human population of these territories were more than 850 millions (C.20% of the world population). The area of lands that were at least moderately damaged (3,475 million hectares) included:

