

Opening remarks

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UNFCCC SBSTA 52 Climate Dialogues

**Dialogue on the relationship between land and climate change
adaptation related matters**

Virtual Session

Monday, 30 November 2020 @ 14:00 - 16:30

Main Committee Room

Excellencies,

Colleagues and friends,

I am truly delighted to be here today. I want to congratulate my friend Tosi Mpanu-Mpanu for convening this panel and directing our attention to the clear, but sometimes overlooked, linkage between land and climate.

At UNCCD, we guide ourselves by the motto healthy land, healthy people. I can easily add a second phrase: healthy land, healthy climate, for healthy people. And vice versa.

Land and climate are intrinsically linked.

All of us, gathered here today, know too well how climate change exacerbates land degradation and diminishes carbon uptake by the land. We also know that land degradation reduces the resilience of human and natural systems to cope with climate change. The land use sector represents almost a quarter of total global emissions.

On the other hand, land restoration puts carbon back in the soil where it belongs. Land restoration brings degraded land back to life and helps us address the expanding food gap we are facing. Very importantly, it does it at a lower cost than “business as usual”.

The IPCC and IPBES latest reports could not have been clearer: climate change and land degradation are like the twin engines of our destruction, with devastating impacts on humans and ecosystems. This linkage has been known for a long time. But we have, collectively failed to act. We are neither keeping up with the challenges we face nor grasping the opportunities inherent in a joined-up approach.

Today, with that awareness, I have a simple ask for you: bring land to the center of your conversations around climate, adaptation and resilience. We should, together, walk the talk.

The land-use sector, through a combination of conservation, sustainable management, and restoration, has great potential to reduce emissions and sequester carbon. Land represents the largest sink for carbon -even larger than oceans. Land has the additional advantage that there are 500 million farming families that can help in the global effort to draw carbon from the atmosphere and put it where it belongs: in our soils and vegetation.

Done right, land management can help increase both human and biophysical resilience. It is not a question of “whether or not” this is possible. Rather, the question is one of the political will to bring land into balance, thereby bringing food, energy and nature also into balance.

Put another way, optimizing « what we do where » on land has the potential to accelerate global efforts to help address the COVID-19 crisis but also to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals, including climate action. A handful of SDG targets, such as Land Degradation Neutrality, can be harnessed to leverage real gains across

the board. Land Degradation Neutrality essentially balances out tradeoffs. It can be used to optimize nature-based solutions at the landscape level so those solutions can be taken to scale.

For example, it can cost less than 100 USD to rehabilitate one hectare of farmland using traditional agro-forestry, water conservation, and livestock management practices. Land restoration is therefore the cheapest solution to climate change, while at the same time creating multiple other opportunities.

We now have the platforms – such as this one - and the opportunity to move in that direction, urgently and with determination, away from our business-as-usual mindset.

2021 will be the first time since 1992 when all 3 Rio Convention COPs will take place in the same year. It will also be a turning point for our post-pandemic recovery, particularly as we mark the start of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. I invite you all to use these opportunities wisely. Land restoration is not divisive. It can unite us.

Rich and poor. North and South. Governments and Civil Society.
Public and Private Sector. Land restoration benefits us all.

Just last week, G20 leaders launched “*the Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and Enhancing Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats*” to prevent, halt, and reverse land degradation. Land -land restoration- is gaining a renewed momentum on the world stage.

We can turn what is currently a vicious circular relationship between land and climate change into a virtuous relationship - by reinforcing positive practices at each stage. This will foster closer collaboration, get us out of our silos and set the stage for a new political and investment paradigm. Together with my other two colleagues of the Rio Conventions, we are already “walking the talk”. We hope you will continue to support us in that endeavor.

Addressing the land – climate and biodiversity nexus is a collective objective that requires a collective response. I am encouraged by today's meeting. I wish you all the best on your deliberations and look forward to a closer collaboration between our Conventions.

Thank you.