

Message of Monique Barbut
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Weather and Climate: Engaging Youth

Climate change is a complex issue whose consequences will affect all spheres of life. Its early impacts on people and ecosystems are already manifest, from extreme and erratic weather events. People are constantly on the move, livelihoods are under threat and ecosystems are changing.

No region has been spared from food spikes linked to crop failure, the loss and damage of property, damage to infrastructure and the cost of global conflicts. No economic sector is untouched. Still, these impacts are not large compared to the effects climate change will have in another 50 to 100 years. Our children, the youth of today, and their offspring, will have to deal with these consequences of our actions. At a minimum, we have two responsibilities towards the youth.

First, we must take responsibility for the future outcomes of our present behaviour and change our development path. We must steer towards a new industrial revolution. To this end, the UNCCD has taken a stand to transform sectors with the greatest impact on the land. Agriculture is a prime target. It produces one-third of the greenhouse gases causing climate change, it has vast impacts on the land and its end products are consumed by every individual on Earth.

In this regard, every country that is a Party to the UNCCD and is affected by desertification is obligated to have a national action programme that is inclusive, with practical measures to combat desertification and prevent it in areas that are slightly or not yet affected. By 2013, 169 Parties had declared they are affected by desertification.

Second, in light of their future roles, it is our responsibility to engage the youth on different fronts. We need to be forthright about the scope and magnitude of the challenge to involve them in finding solutions and socialize them, by example, towards a new development path that truly addresses the global environmental challenges.

The review meeting of the Parties held last April agreed that youth education on these issues is indispensable. Our focus this year on the theme of ecosystem-based adaptation with a rallying call, 'Land belongs to the future, let's climate proof it!' for the World Day to Combat Desertification to be observed on 17 June, is a step in this direction.

Productive land, the resource that nourishes all life is diminishing. An additional 2 billion people will also be depending on it in another 30 years. Let us engage the youth to avoid our past land-use mistakes. If not, they are condemned to repeat them.
