

## Summary of proceedings for Rio Conventions Pavilion UNCCD COP 12 - 19 October 2015: Land for Life Day

Monday, October 19, 2015 at 01:59PM



Erdoğan Özevren gives his opening remarks



Maximillian Abouleisch-Boes explains how SEKEM restored desert area in Egypt

Land for Life Day was opened by Rajeb Boulharouf, Chef de Cabinet of the UNCCD, who stressed the importance of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). Further remarks were made by Erdoğan Özevren, Turkey's National Focal point to the UNCCD, who said Turkey has sent a simple message to its people: Don't let Turkey become desert. Dennis Garrity, Dryland Ambassador drew attention to the idea of land being a community of which humans are a part. He went further by saying while humans have a rich system of ethics to govern how we deal with one another, our ethics concerning the land are still in a very primitive state. His position is that there will be no change concerning land until communities come together to make change themselves. Communities are indeed the key to achieving a land degradation world.

The opening was followed by a sharing session with this year's Land for Life Award Winners - SEKEM and Elion. These prize winners represent the very best in sustainable land management practices. Elion shared a movie showcasing the transformation of 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the Kabuqi desert in China - a green plateau several hundred years ago-- back into a lush forest area where communities now flourish. Afterward, SEKEM's Chief Sustainable Development Officer, Maximillian Abouleisch-Boes described the organization's exceptional restoration work of desert areas in Egypt. He said there is a lot of land that can be reclaimed in Egypt, which is important because the population doubles every 20 years. He stressed that local and international partnerships helped SEKEM succeed by sharing the risk.



Open Forum on the Secrets Behind the Success of Stakeholder Engagement in Achieving LDN

An interactive open forum session featured experts in sustainable land management (SLM) sharing their views on how to engage all stakeholders during implementation of SLM work. Associate Professor Barış Karapınar, CEO of the Turkish Foundation to Combat Soil Erosion (TEMA Foundation), says the organization uses various media, including social media engagement, on a daily basis to reach out to stakeholders and political groups involved in SLM, which has seen great success. Abouleisch-Boes from SEKEM explains how the private enterprise engages farmers in Egypt by helping them access markets and show the long term financial benefit of adopting SLM. Mark Schauer of the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) initiative says the ELD makes the knowledge of experts available to all stakeholders via online resources, such as online courses that address many different sectors. Yukie Hori of the UNCCD made the point that it is important to directly involve leaders of stakeholder groups in order to mobilize large groups of people to get the attention of policymakers.

The audience was then treated to a discussion with film Director John Liu over lunch. Liu was the 2011 Green Screen Award winner, recognised for his experience in ground filming. He shared a clip of his film *Forests Keep Drylands Working*, which carries a powerful message for the public to understand existing approaches that can be used to combat desertification and land degradation. A particular point Liu stressed is we must align human behaviors with natural systems, because we cannot try to manipulate natural systems and simply hope everything will be okay. He went on to say that biotic systems are more valuable than anything that has been or ever will be made, bought or sold.



Marioldy Sánchez Santivanez presents her TED style Talk



Lucia Madrid discusses how the Mexican NGO, CCMSS, strengthens local community land managers

The afternoon rolled on with TED Talk style presentations answering the question, “Is LDN compelling and achievable?” Three SLM experts, Marioldy Sánchez Santivanez, Head Department of Planning Monitoring of Association for Research and Integrated Development (AIDER), Dennis Garrity and Willem Ferwerda, Chief Executive Officer of Commonland talked about LDN. During her talk, Sánchez Santivanez spoke about how to put LDN into practice. She included that forming partnerships is very important to do upfront, as well as taking time to plan before jumping into action. Thereafter, Garrity explained that future agricultural lands will be managed better, as they will incorporate climate smart agriculture, which will increase resilience and carbon sequestration. He feels LDN is achievable because many large scale restorations, such as that in the Sahel region, have already succeeded. In the next talk, Ferwerda emphasized that the conversation needs to be about people: land degradation occurs because of soil degradation, he said. Moreover, he explained that the economic sector is finally listening to issues about land, but scientists need to talk to these investors about jobs and money instead of about abstract ideas, such as soil fertility.

Participants then heard from past as well as and present Land for Life Award winners. Lucia Madrid of CCMSS, a Mexican NGO that won the Land for Life Award in 2013, spoke about the importance of empowering communities managing resources and land. Madrid explained that local communities should control the region’s resources because they are the ones who will stay in the region long term and that when resources are managed well, it positively affects the whole community.

The day wound down with a relaxed networking session, as participants chatted with SLM experts over hor d'oeuvres and refreshments.