



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

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Opening Speech

COP13

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Time for the Butterfly to Flap its Wings

Friends,

Focal Points,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Ordos.

Allow me to extend my sincere thanks to the Govt. of the People's Republic of China for their warm and efficient welcome.

When in China and when you want to urge wisdom, quoting Confucius is a good place to start.

Confucius once said "Only the wisest and stupidest of men never change".

As most of us are neither the wisest or stupidest of people, we are – we must – learn to embrace change.

I fully recognize, for UNCCD Parties, the last few years have been all about change. We have made a lot of progress. I would suggest, it has been something of a metamorphosis.

A complete change in form: caterpillar, to pupa – safe in its chrysalis - to butterfly. The same genetics but a very different beast.



Historically, despite the importance of the issue [the egg], UNCCD made slow progress. We got caught up in affected and non-affected and a process that prioritized perfect agreement rather than tangible progress. We were perhaps content to advance at the pace of a caterpillar.

But do you know...when the caterpillar becomes a pupa – and retreats inside its chrysalis/UN cocoon – it starts to digest itself? If you were to cut open a chrysalis [at just the right time], a sort of protein rich caterpillar soup would ooze out.

And it is not entirely a soupy mess. Groups of cells survive and use the protein-rich soup to form the adult butterfly. The transformation is complete.

So it may have felt like UNCCD spent a little too much time wading through a soupy mess. But it is time well invested: a new strategy framework has been born. A framework I trust will be endorsed at COP13.

It gives us a new sense of purpose and common cause.

With land degradation neutrality as an organizing principle embedded within the strategy and as Convention is recognized as the custodian of this target, we have an important accelerator target for the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Climate Change agreement.

The indicators developed by UNCCD Parties on land cover, land productivity and organic carbon will be used to measure progress at global level. This global push has allowed us to begin forging partnerships on issues such as remote sensing and satellite data.



With a clear target and with the data to back it up, we have been able to get much better organized.

This data is allowing, currently, 110 countries to set voluntary national LDN targets to drive their national action plans. This is a massive undertaking involving 11 donors and thousands of colleagues across Ministries and departments worldwide. So at this COP we can already learn how that exercise is progressing, where the gaps and the hotspots are. But change is definitely gathering pace.

COP 21 endorsed the importance of land in carbon sequestration and the IPCC planning to release in 2019 a special report on the role of land in tackling climate change. At the same time, we see a new climate narrative emerging that explicitly recognizes the need to address the resilience challenges of communities in the face of water scarcity and drought in particular.

This year, once again, we have been rightly outraged by needless losses, instability, famine and death in drought afflicted areas of Africa and South America. I commend Parties that have taken vigorous actions for their leadership. On biodiversity, we saw short term action plans for ecosystem restoration emerging out of the Cancun COP. Parties to the Biodiversity Convention are aligning on our indicators for Aichi Target 15. While the UN Forest Framework new strategy also endorses the LDN approach.

The move of the GM to Bonn is a clear success. A strong, complementary corporate identity has emerged with clarity on who does what - that does away with unnecessary duplication.



The new Deputy Executive Secretary – Mr. Pradeep Monga – has taken up the mantle of enhancing our internal systems. We improve and simplify our administration to provide a better cost / benefit to your financial contributions.

So, from what may have seemed like a soupy mess a few short years ago, something rather wonderful is emerging.

Land, like the butterfly, is emerging as the critical component in a number of politically relevant, high profile issues. There is political will to address land issues and the secretariat and the GM are increasingly able to act effectively. The stars are aligned.

But, I fear, this is a limited window of opportunity. And there are huge expectations for what we can achieve by 2030.

So at this COP and in the near future, we need to focus on IMPLEMENTATION.

Implementation means:

1) Turning your LDN targets into action.

It would be intolerable for me that we have invested so much time and effort into getting to this point and you, dear Parties, did not see the real benefit. Much of the work needs to continue to be done by your own governments, of course. But there are important external developments, particularly financial ones.

At COP13, you will hear about the launch of the LDN Fund. This is the first time that there is a fund dedicated to rehabilitating degraded land. I am more delighted that it will be managed by the private sector. In that, I thank the



Mirova-Nataxis group for their outstanding work in shepherding the establishment of the Fund.

You will also here other truly great commitments to LDN implementation from a number of Parties.

So while an increasing amount of public and private financial resources is expected, the missing piece is now a pipeline of technically sound projects – drawn from your LDN targets - delivering on the sustainability triple bottom line.

So, moving beyond just cooperation at inter-secretariat level we are working with the UNFCCC and CBD, to elaborate together the Rio Conventions Project Preparation Facility to assist in the development of investment-ready projects at the scale needed to create economic and social benefits while addressing pressing land, climate, and biodiversity challenges.

2) But we also need to take decisions on issues that we have not yet dealt with.

I think in particular about what should be the positive agenda to address droughts or sand dust storms.

Gender and land tenure security are also of special importance. We would all like to see the transformative projects you are developing become more gender sensitive and responsive to the heavy daily workload of rural women.

3) On all these issues, Knowledge/Strategic Communication:



To support you further, we need to focus on our knowledge base. We will work with the SPI to support the IPCC and IPBES special reports that are due to be released in the coming months. I hope you will also find the Global Land Outlook a useful strategic communications product.

Partnerships

I think you can see, I am optimistic and enthusiastic. We are at a unique moment. To my mind, it is absolutely the time for UNCCD to emerge from the shadows. To emerge like a butterfly from the chrysalis.

To do this, we will rely on your insight. We will draw on not a little ancient Chinese wisdom. And will hope for bold, forward looking decisions.

Thank you.