

25
YEARS



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

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7th Kubuqi International Desert Forum

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Desertification**
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“If they can’t be good, let them be greedy”

[Introduction]

Her Excellency Madam **SUN Chunlan**, Vice Premier,

Mr. **WAN Zugang**, Minister of Science and Technology

Mr. **ZHANG Jianlong**, Administrator of National Forest and Grassland Administration

Mr. **LI, Jiheng**, Secretary of CPCC Committee of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region

Mr. **Wang Wenbiao**, Secretary-General of Kubuqi International Desert Forum

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

My thanks to everyone contributing to this year's Forum. It's continued success:

- Not only advances our fight against desertification and land degradation,
- But also demonstrates the power of partnerships at every level in the tackling related issues like biodiversity loss, climate change and inequality.

In particular, it highlights the importance of sharing knowledge and best practice among scientists, businesses, local communities and policy makers:

- To transform individual lives,
- And scale up innovative solutions for global impact.

[Scaling up human – local - national - global]

At a **human** level:

- Growing licorice allows Kubuqi residents like to earn much more than they would in the nearby coal mines and restores the land enough to produce other crops within just four years.
- Likewise, cleaning solar panels supports nearly 50 families, while the run-off waters the crops below.

At a *local* level, over the last 30 years, restoring 6,000 square kilometers of the Kubuqi desert has already seen:

- A fourfold increase in precipitation.
- A fivefold increase in biodiversity.
- And a *ten*fold increase in vegetation cover.

At a *national* level, 50 years of concerted efforts in China are paying off.

- Beyond the work here in Inner Mongolia,
- successful projects like those in Mulsu, Saihanba and Hetian,
- and, of course, the Great Green Wall, have:
 - More than doubled forest cover to nearly 22%.
 - And lifted 70 million people out of poverty.

And at a *global* level:

- While the lives of half the population were degraded alongside their land.
- There are now over 250 land management techniques to green the Belt and Road across Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Some of the people creating hope and opportunity with such techniques are among the *Land for Life* winners with us today.

- We will hear more about them this afternoon,
- but *all* the finalists are making a remarkable contribution to restoring land and lives around the world.

Like the Konya Sugar Industry & Trade Corporation in Turkey, which has helped to transform 1,000 hectares of land into forests.

Or the World Bank's Paula Agostini's work with the TerrAfrica project.

- Which restored 2 million hectares in Africa and Latin America.
- And increased tenure security and income for 15,000 young people in Africa alone.

We need to scale up such efforts to restore the 2 billion hectares available; and:

- Help sequester up to 3 billion tonnes of carbon per year.
- Offer a low tech, low cost climate change adaptation strategy that can be flexibly implemented in all countries.
- Reduce the impacts of drought, flood and other climate related shocks.
- Manage migration.
- Enhance biodiversity.
- Avoid conflicts over land and water resources in degradation "hot-spots".

[Profitability of land restoration]

Best of all - even if you need to convince someone who doesn't care about nature or poverty or what happens to the next generation.

Restoring our land *still* makes business sense.

- The Kubuqi Restoration alone could be worth nearly \$2 billion over 50 years.
- The more people those efforts can lift out of poverty, onto the power grid and into education or healthcare, then the more consumers and employees could be available for businesses.
- The returns of taking action at a global level are estimated at 5 US dollars for every US dollar invested in land restoration.

In other words, if they don't want to restore land because they are *good*, get them do it because they are *greedy*!

[Conclusion]

There's an old proverb that says "*The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now.*"

I just hope that in 2045:

- When people look back at tonight's Land for Life Award winners
- And at all of us
- They will agree we did indeed plant trees and take action.
- Whether, for good or for greed, we acted on time.

Certainly, building on the success of China's Presidency of the UNCCD COP:

- We will make that case at COP14 in New Delhi this September.
- And, again, at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York shortly after.

I know I can count on all of you here today to make that happen.

To act. And to act on time.

Thank you.

723 words (approx. 7 minutes)