Check against delivery

Opening Remarks

Ibrahim Thiaw, UNCCD Executive Secretary

High-level session of the SDS Day
Co-organized by the UNCCD and the UNEP

New Delhi, 6 September 2019 at 13H00

Rio Convention Pavillon, MET11

Postal Address: PO Box 260129, 53153 Bonn, Germany
UN Campus, Platz der Vereinten Nationen 1, D-53113 Bonn, Germany

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

Good afternoon! And welcome to the SDS Day session to launch the UN SDS Coalition and SDS global source base-map.

Let me begin with referencing the most recent IPCC special report on Climate Change and Land. It is obvious from the report that land management and climate change adaptation and mitigation are closely linked.

And I would like to highlight the report also says that "*the frequency and intensity of dust storms have increased over the last few decades due to land use and land cover changes and climate-related factors in many dryland areas resulting in*

increasing negative impacts on human health, in regions such as the Arabian Peninsula and broader Middle East, Central Asia (high confidence)".[1]

Indeed, Sand and Dust Storms – SDS - are occurring in many dry areas in Africa, Asia, North America and Australia. Dust storms often go far beyond their regions of origin. Sirocco, haboob, yellow dust, white storms and the harmattan are the same challenge by a different name. They are transboundary challenges with often global effects. They are locally devastating.

[1] Summary for Policymakers. IPCC Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse gas fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems

- In May 2018, high-velocity dust storms swept across parts of North India. More than 125 people died and over 200 were injured.

- Also in 2018, sand and salt storms from the so-called Aralkum Desert (Aral sea region) covered some provinces and the capital city of Turkmenistan -Ashgabat. Cotton fields, orchards and pastures were covered with salt.

- Earlier in March 2018, an unusual sand and dust storm nicknamed ‘Mars on Earth or Orange Snow’ transformed European landscapes into surreal orange-tinted scenes.

151 countries are directly affected.

The lives, health, well-being and sustainable development of millions of people are impacted. As one small but deadly example:

Prolonged exposure to fine dust causes premature death. It damages the air sacs in the lungs and causes or worsens the symptoms of bronchitis and respiratory diseases, such as asthma.

- Globally, 334 million people and 14% of children experience asthmatic symptoms.
- Meningitis and valley fever outbreaks in Africa and the US are associated with dust storms.

Since 2015, the UN General Assembly has adopted four resolutions in a row to combat sand and dust storms.

In 2017, the 13th session of Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD adopted its first substantial decision on sand and dust storms. The Conference invited governments to take action based on the activities proposed in the Convention's Policy Advocacy Framework on sand and dust storms. The Framework sets out precautionary measures to minimize the negative impacts of sand and dust storms in the three key areas of early warning, resilience and preparedness, and source mitigation.

The UNCCD wants to play its part in combating SDS effectively.

We are specifically looking at the management and reduction of emissions from new SDS source areas. Source areas that have emerged because of land degradation/drought.

With that in mind, at COP 13, Parties asked us to explore how to integrate SDS into the idea of land degradation neutrality (LDN).

Certainly, we have found countries with potential SDS sources can include these as hot spot areas in their voluntary LDN targets.

Iraq for example considers combating SDS through sand dune fixation as a specific sub target of its national LDN target.

More widely, the global sand and dust storms base-map that is going to be launched here today, can serve as a starting point for other Parties to consider this issue more systematically.

The base-map, developed by the UNCCD secretariat in collaboration with UNEP and WMO, aims to provide base-line information. It should help Parties with planning and implementing SDS related policy including source management, risk assessment, vulnerability mapping, monitoring, forecasting and early warning and so on.

If we could link this map to your LDN decision making, we could deliver our common goals more effectively and efficiently and mitigate anthropogenic sources of SDS.

Again, the IPCC special report concluded that sustainable land management, such as tree planting and ecosystem restoration programs can lessen the negative effect of wind erosion and improve air quality and health (high confidence). There are already inspiring examples out there of where this has worked.

The Kubuqi desert - in China is one. Here, special plants grip the shifting sands and prevent dune encroachment into vulnerable farms and villages. Such source management can bring multiple benefits including increasing biodiversity and soil productivity. SDS risk has been slashed.

But there are numerous other techniques and best practices are available.

So, we are also delighted to be a part of the UN SDS Coalition. It is new commitment by relevant UN entities to join forces to address SDS. I would suggest, to be really effective, such inclusive pooling of talents can be replicated at national and even local level.

Within everyone at the table, I am sure we can scale up and scale out the good work that is being done.

Large scale, transformative projects that successfully deliver for LDN for example would also deliver for SDS.

This is a big challenge. But we are at an exciting moment in addressing it.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the entire team.

Thank you.
