

25
YEARS



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

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Under Secretary-General & Executive Secretary
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Durban, South Africa
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“If in doubt, just say land”

Her Excellency Barbara CREECY, Minister of Environment,
Forestry and Fisheries of South Africa and host of this meeting,

His Excellency Lee WHITE, Minister of Forests, Sea and
Environment, in Charge of Climate Change of Gabon and
Chairperson of AMCEN,

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,



For over 30 years, commitment and cooperation has seen AMCEN make incredible strides and tough decisions that benefit people right across this continent – and often beyond.

And for 25 of them, UNCCD has been privileged to support those endeavours.

But... sorry, there's always a but...

....Those years have also seen Africa increasingly pushed to the sharp end of land degradation and overstretched natural resources

There's no doubt that whatever is driving such degradation.

- Be it global warming,
- Urban expansion,
- Or excessive consumer demand – from home or abroad



The most vulnerable pay the highest price. They suffer greater poverty. Or are forced to abandon their land and homes to survive.

However, there is also no doubt that by using our land - as a way to turn environmental policy into real action, that this destructive narrative can be dramatically rewritten.

With the help of many of the people in this room today, that message came across loud and clear at our Conference of the Parties in September.

1. We sent a strong signal to the New York Summits that every single investment in land unlocks *multiple* opportunities for jobs, climate change and the SDGs.
 - This was backed by the latest report from the IPCC confirming how the links between climate, biodiversity and land work *both* ways.



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- Either contributing up to a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions and feeding a destructive cycle of hunger, poverty and insecurity.
 - Or *accelerating* some of the most cost-effective solutions available to restore one of the biggest carbon sinks available while improving the health and wellbeing of this planet and its people.
2. We confirmed the business case for that investment and explored areas where the private sector is looking for policies that create an enabling environment with incentives for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of natural resources.
- An environment that can cover an incredible spectrum of economic benefits at every level.



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- From fueling the *global* economy by saving over \$20 trillion a year and protecting ecosystem services worth over \$100 trillion.¹
 - To strengthening *rural* economies by generating over \$30 billion of additional annual income for the smallholders.
3. We put drought at the right level. It is a problem **that is** not only affecting as many as 50 million people a year and every area of development - but is also becoming more frequent, more widespread and more intense as climate change gathers momentum.
- This heightened awareness is now backed by the UNCCD drought toolbox, which provides technical and policy tools to develop national drought plans, including monitoring and mitigation.

¹ <https://www.eld-initiative.org/>



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- And it will soon be complemented by three indicators, which can help boost early warning systems and inform drought mitigation, both nationally and regionally.
 - An Intergovernmental Working Group is being established to push forward these discussions further.
4. And, perhaps even more importantly, we also put people at the right level – right at the heart of everything we do.
- Focusing on how land restoration and management can reduce the impact climate change is *already* having on people's lives – recognising the problems we face *today*, as well as those we will face tomorrow.
 - Highlighting how related issues like tenure rights or access to finance can bring stability and redress inequalities between men and women, young and old, rich and poor, or rural and urban communities.



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- Understanding where capacity building can make all of that possible.
 - And where the inclusion of gender and land governance indicators adds value to the reporting process.

What's inescapable - across all of those areas - is that African nations are leading this shake-up. They are better placed to rewrite the narrative on land than any other continent on the planet.

Yes, with two-thirds of Africa's population is already affected by land degradation.

There is much that needs to be done.

But , we should not lose sight of how much is already *being done* – in Africa.



Looking as far out as the Agenda 2063, Africa is leading the way in turning the theory of an environmental restoration revolution into practice.

There are practical partnerships emerging that offer a valuable proof of concept for using land as the foundation for sustainable development.

- The 3S initiative on Sustainability, Security and Stability, for example. Rather than considering conflicts over declining resources and forced migration as an inevitable part of the continent's future. The 3S will be offering a choice. With long term secure tenure - and decent green job and income generating opportunities on the land - up to 2 million vulnerable young people will be transformed from a problem – to be managed – into an asset for their communities. An asset to be cherished and leveraged.



And if you are going to show how investing in land delivers multiple, cost-effective solutions, there can be few examples as powerful as Africa's Great Green Wall.

- It's not only creating an 8,000 km barrier against climate change by restoring 100 million hectares of land across the Sahel,
- Sequestering 250 million tons of carbon.
- And helping the communities along it to adapt and be more resilient - creating 10 million rural jobs along the way.

Imagine any other wall delivering economic returns of up to 40%!

This is being done through irrigation systems, forest management and soil & water conservation projects. In places as diverse as Niger, Mali, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Nigeria.



And while returns like that are certainly impressive, the transformative business case for land restoration in Africa goes much, *much* further.

Today, 80% of all jobs here come from the land. A new green industrial revolution would create even more diverse possibilities for land restoration *and* for employment.

For example, Moses Kimani founded his precision agriculture company, Lanterna, two years ago.

- It's already fighting pests, disease and climate change for 4,000 large and small-scale farmers in Kenya.
- Using remote sensors, satellite data and drones his company can identify precisely which inputs and farming techniques are best for specific plots of land,



- boosting some yields by nearly 50%, while eliminating chemical fertilizers that damage the land and surrounding biodiversity.²³

There are three reasons why I use that example.

1. First, Moses is part of a new generation of Africans who:

- combine their understanding of sustainable farming and land restoration,
- with an incredible technical capacity and an entrepreneurial mindset
- to launch solutions that could be rapidly and profitably scaled up across the region.

2. Second, because this is a story being multiplied across Africa with the number of tech hubs doubling to over 600 in just three years.⁴

² <https://www.wri.org/blog/2019/10/attention-investors-african-entrepreneurs-are-restoring-land-and-making-profit>

³ <https://africanews.space/kenyas-lentera-is-fundraising-to-scale-climate-smart-solutions-for-african-farmers/>

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tobyshapshak/2019/10/30/africa-now-has-643-tech-hubs-which-play-pivotal-role-for-business/#6c48fec94e15>



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- But - many restoration businesses like Moses' can't take off as they should because they are falling into a funding gap. They are too big for microfinance and too small for institutional investors.
 - To my mind, these are innovative start-ups where a *single* investment can bring new jobs, protect traditional jobs, advance the NDCs for climate change and reach the targets for the SDGS.
 - So, it's in all of our interests to make sure we create an enabling environment for financially viable solutions of every size – not just for big business.
3. And third, Africa has the youngest population in the world, so nurturing that start-up environment can tap into a natural competitive advantage.



- I'm sure we're going to hear a lot about this in the coming days, with the African Union's "*1 Million by 2021 Initiative*" and the latest "*Global Environment Outlook for Youth*".

Together, we can rewrite the long running *cliché* that shows Africa as a victim.

Instead, let us see land as the central character in a new African story.

So, in the Ministerial dialogues over the next two days:

- Anytime someone says: "*there's too many problems, where do we start?*"
- You say "*land*".

In the preparations for the upcoming climate COP25:

- Anytime someone says: "*it's too complex, how can we pull in the same direction?*"



- You say: “*land*”.

And in the discussions to prepare next year’s landmark COP15 on biodiversity:

- Anytime someone says: “*we’ve hit a deadlock - there’s too many different priorities, too many conflicting interests among too many Parties?*”
- You say: “*start with land and go from there.*”

It’s easy.

If in doubt, just say land – you’ll be surprised at how many of the paths to reach our targets for 2030 and 2063 are right beneath our feet.

Thank you.