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World Day to Combat Desertification Bulletin

A Briefing Note of the World Day to Combat Desertification Global Observance Event - "Land Belongs to the Future – Let's Climate Proof it"

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BRIEFING NOTE OF THE WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION GLOBAL OBSERVANCE EVENT: 17 JUNE 2014

The 2014 World Day to Combat Desertification global observance event focused on the theme of ecosystem-based adaptation, with a rallying call "Land Belongs to the Future – Let's Climate Proof It." Approximately 400 representatives from government, intergovernmental and civil society organizations (CSOs) registered for the event, which took place on Tuesday, 17 June 2014, at World Bank headquarters in Washington, DC, US. The event was also webcast, and speakers responded to questions from a global audience. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) organized the event, which was hosted by the World Bank in partnership with the Global Environment Facility (GEF), TerrAfrica and Connect4Climate.

On the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the UNCCD, speakers at the global observance event considered the requirements for ecosystem-based adaptation to address issues related to desertification, land degradation and drought as well as shared successful cases of combating desertification in drylands. Keynote speakers discussed national efforts, and panelists presented research and lessons learned to address land degradation and foster adaptation and resilience. Two short films were screened, demonstrating additional projects and lessons learned. The Land for Life award winners were also announced. This briefing note summarizes the event's proceedings.

OPENING REMARKS

At the opening of the global observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification, participants were invited to tweet their views of the event using the hashtags #WDCD2014 and #desertification.

Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, welcomed participants and highlighted that the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reveals that every country is vulnerable and exposed to climate change. She stated that adaptation should be an integral part of all countries' response to climate change, and stressed that climate impacts are felt at the local level and adaptation measures need to be practical and empowering at this level. She said there are simple and affordable techniques that can stop land degradation, such as agroforestry, and success requires smart investment and a rethinking of existing financing strategies. Barbut suggested that food, water, income and security threats could be eased if common measures of success are established at the global level, sensible investments are made in sustainable land use practices, and safety nets are created. She noted that the next 18 months

will bring decisions regarding the post-2015 development agenda and the future of climate action, and hoped that the path chosen would lead towards land-based resilience.

Mahmoud Mohieldin, Corporate Secretary and President's Special Envoy, World Bank, highlighted that, while population growth is expected to lead to a rise in food demand, crop yields could decline if no action is taken to address climate change. He said investments must be made in solutions that are applicable, affordable and transformative, and there must be more ambition to scale up efforts at all levels. He emphasized the need to take action on four issue areas: developing better enabling environments for people to invest directly in land management, including through ensuring tenure systems are in place; developing climate smart agriculture and diversification; supporting research and development; and making public investments in landscape restoration and rehabilitation. He said it is time to act together, and noted the importance of the coming year as the post-2015 development agenda is established.

Naoko Ishii, Chief Executive Officer, Global Environment Facility (GEF), highlighted that land degradation is a multifaceted problem, and that improving land management practices at scale means safeguarding multiple ecosystem services. She noted that Africa is emerging as the epicenter of efforts to slow and reverse land degradation trends, and that millions of hectares are being regenerated by smallholders practicing agroforestry and sustainable forest management, for example. She noted that most of the techniques being used are not new, but their application by large numbers of smallholders can create impacts at scale. She expressed hope that the experience with the Great Green Wall initiative, a pan-African project to address poverty and land degradation in the Sahara and Sahel, will be built upon in other continents, and said a pilot for food security would be implemented in Africa in the next investment cycle.

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

Prime Minister of Niger Brigi Rafini noted that the people of the Sahel struggle daily with the issues of drought and desertification, and Niger is one of the countries hardest hit by desertification. He said his country's challenges include increases in temperature extremes, a shorter rainy season, and Lake Chad has almost completely dried up. He added that these climate risks bring loss of life, decreased agricultural production, conflict, food insecurity and diseases. He said there should be a focus on the sustainable management of ecosystems, and highlighted that the accomplishments of the Great Green Wall initiative include the restoration of degraded land and reforestation, among others. He emphasized that winning the fight against desertification and climate change is within reach, and expressed hope that Niger's experience can provide lessons learned for other countries.

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Uahekua Herunga, Minister of Environment and Tourism of Namibia and President of the UNCCD's eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 11), highlighted that the global observance event was taking place on the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the UNCCD. He called for seizing the momentum of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCS, or Rio+20) to promote a land degradation neutral world and recognize the role of the UNCCD in leading such efforts. He emphasized that monitoring of land degradation will become increasingly important through the UNCCD and post-2015 development agenda processes, stressed the importance of developing national drought management policies, and looked forward to a strengthened UNCCD in the coming years.

LAND FOR LIFE AWARD

Minister Herunga announced the winners of the Land for Life Award, which he highlighted is the only global award that recognizes organizations and individuals for working to restore the natural capital of soil. The two winners are: Conservation Organization for Afghan Mountain Areas (COAM), Afghanistan, which has had a special focus on women's empowerment; and Green Asia Network (GAN), Republic of Korea, for its work in Mongolia to train locals in forestry practices and sustainable agriculture. He noted that special mention was also awarded to Adi-Shimhaby Village, Eritrea, which he said has improved livelihoods while fostering good land stewardship. Herunga noted that an award ceremony would take place later this year.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

GREENING ETHIOPIA'S HIGHLANDS: A NEW HOPE FOR AFRICA: Magda Lovei, Sector Manager, World Bank, moderated this panel discussion. She noted that the World Bank's engagement with Ethiopia on sustainable land management (SLM) has included the development of a number of knowledge products to share the lessons learned with others, including the development of a short documentary film showcasing Ethiopia's success in sustainable land and water management that was screened at the beginning of the panel discussion.

Ambassador Tebege Berhe, Deputy Chief of Mission to the US, Ethiopia, noted that some of the areas shown in the film were the epicenter of the great famine in Ethiopia, but the film indicates that they are now rehabilitated and green. He said his country's achievement has required the highest commitment from the top to the bottom. He stressed that the entire population was mobilized, and that this was achieved not only through finance, but through commitment and "people ready to get out of poverty." He also said work has begun to plant 8 billion trees during the current rainy season.

Jamal Saghir, Director, Africa Sustainable Development, World Bank, said there is hope for addressing drylands, but it requires commitment at the highest level and building on community initiative. He emphasized that lessons from other countries include: the need to be more ambitious, to scale up and to speed up; and the need for sharing experiences and knowledge globally.

Juergen Voegele, Director, Agriculture and Environmental Services Department, World Bank, emphasized the lesson from the Ethiopian experience of needing a committed government with a strategy plus a true bottom up approach. He highlighted the need for an approach that "lets nature do the job," such as the "cut and carry" approach adopted in the film for feeding livestock, rather than letting livestock graze freely on the land. He also stressed the importance of land tenure arrangements,

and recognizing that it is a multisectoral issue that requires an integrated package and not a single line ministry. He concluded stating that "landscapes don't need to be managed, it is the people that need to be managed."

Sara Scherr, President, EcoAgriculture Partners, said her organization has documented over eighty integrated landscape management efforts. She said it is no longer an issue or solution for only the marginal drylands, but it is also becoming the approach to ensure the sustainable intensification of agriculture. She highlighted the need to think about linkages and focus on financial mechanisms, supportive policies and getting businesses involved.

During the discussion, participants and panelists discussed specific country experiences, such as Mongolia's challenges in managing its pasture land, and how different national systems could incorporate land tenure practices. A role for social media in developed countries as well as in developing countries was noted, with an audience member stating that lobbying needs to happen in the North to put this issue on the agenda more seriously.

ECOSYSTEM-BASED ADAPTATION: Andrew Revkin, Senior Fellow for Environmental Understanding, Pace University, moderated this panel discussion, which considered the meaning and value added of ecosystem-based adaptation. Revkin noted that, no matter what happens with climate change policy, there are going to be enormous impacts that will play out in highly consequential ways, and asked panelists what they saw as the key issues for ecosystem-based land management.

Dennis Garrity, UNCCD Drylands Ambassador and Senior Fellow, World Agroforestry Centre, said there has been a change in the last few years in the way that land regeneration is perceived, and there is a developing understanding that millions of farmers are regenerating their lands and that this can be scaled up. He asked whether or not it was possible to catch up with what farmers have done and adapt investments to focus on knowledge transfer among farmers, rather than purchasing more farming inputs.

Benoit Bosquet, Sector Manager, World Bank, said there should be a focus on how to reconnect the mitigation and adaptation agendas in climate change negotiations. He noted that mitigation receives greater funding, and said the challenge is to look beyond the strict scope of adaptation finance to see how, through mitigation, finances could be harnessed.

Gustavo da Fonseca, Head, Natural Resources, GEF Secretariat, said the way that the way international agreements and funding lines are set up prevents action on issues that cannot be addressed line by line, sector by sector. He said an operational definition of cost effective ways to invest in ecosystem adaptation is missing, and suggested looking at the economics of ecosystem-based adaptation.

Elmedina Krilasevic, Management Board President, Forestry and Environmental Action and UNCCD Civil Society Panel member, asked what role CSOs can play in the process. She emphasized the importance of disaster preparedness and involving CSOs in creating policies.

Jeff Herrick, Soil Scientist, Agriculture Research Service, Department of Agriculture, US, emphasized the need to share knowledge to combat desertification and land degradation. Noting that scaling up can be a bad thing for the farmer on a piece of land where a project does not work, he emphasized the need to target strategies to the conditions where they will work. He announced UNCCD's new map of SLM resources, organized by country and connecting the user with global knowledge bases, which was prepared as part of the UNCCD's Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal project. He also called attention

to other knowledge resources, including the FAO Global Agroecological Zoning System, World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT), Landscape Toolbox, and Land-Potential Knowledge System (LandPKS).

During the discussion, panelists stressed: the need to secure innovative alternative financing such as climate funds; identifying well-tuned solutions to each land degradation problem; not assuming that solutions will work in all soil and vegetation conditions; the need to integrate natural capital valuation into planning; and the need to get public opinion behind good policies and to incorporate communications components as part of projects from the start. Other issues discussed included: whether crowd funding would be an option; using the UNCCD's Marketplace as a tool for matching financial and skill demand and supply; the Convention on Biological Diversity's efforts to match donors with protected areas around the world; and whether a theology of land and religion could be involved in discussions of land and ecosystems.

A CONVERSATION ON DRYLANDS: PERSPECTIVES FROM AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST: This panel session considered development challenges of drylands in Africa and the Middle East. Moderator Phil Hay, Communications Manager, World Bank, opened the session noting that drylands are home to 50% of the population in Africa.

Raffaello Cervigni, Lead Environmental Economist, World Bank, discussed the World Bank's work to inform the next generation of policies for resilience, based on an ongoing study titled "The Economics of Resilience in the Drylands of Sub-Saharan Africa," which is being prepared by the World Bank and a number of partners. He said the study seeks to characterize current and future challenges to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience in drylands, and to provide an evidence-based framework to improve decision making on options to enhance resilience. Among the initial findings that he highlighted were: three key assets – livestock, land and education – vary when considered in drylands and in non-drylands; vulnerability is affected by the natural resource base and vulnerability profiles will change in the future; there is considerable scope for developing irrigation, with the prospects being more favorable for small-scale applications; tree-based production systems are technically feasible and economically sound; and landscape approaches bring multiple benefits. He said the study aims to develop recommendations that will be country and livelihood specific.

Mona Eldaief, Director, Solar Mamas, introduced a trailer of the film "Solar Mamas," which presents a project in which the Barefoot College of India trains mothers and grandmothers to become solar engineers in a period of six months, following which they return to their villages and solar-electrify them. She noted that the Barefoot College has trained more than 700 women.

Edwige Botoni, Natural Resource Management Specialist, Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), discussed challenges for farmers in the Sahel. She noted the results of a study on why technologies are not adopted, including challenges related to poverty, preferences to leave rural areas, and the absence of land tenure guarantees. She also emphasized the importance of political will.

Norbert Henninger, Senior Associate, People and Ecosystems Program, World Resources Institute, discussed the landscape approach. He said farmers need to find their own solutions, and emphasized the need for a clear definition of rights and responsibilities within communities, and getting the incentives right for making long term investments.

Banu Setlur, Senior Environmental Specialist, World Bank, discussed the situation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. She said that deserts cannot be regarded as wastelands as they are unique ecosystems. She noted a project in Jordan that is looking at aspects of ecotourism, and another that is establishing range reserves by creating community buy-in and ensuring that there are alternative sources of income for the local communities.

During the discussion, which included questions that were submitted from individuals watching the webcast of the event, participants emphasized women's access to land as an important issue in the Sahel. As final "headlines" for the discussion, the panelists suggested: working across sectors can reduce vulnerability and exposure to shocks; the MENA region offers knowledge for what the world is going through now; combining opportunities for resilience and growth in and around drylands; community-based solutions and relying on natural resources and women should be pursued; and scaling up best practices and supporting poor people.

CLOSING REMARKS

In her closing remarks, Monique Barbut reiterated her opening message that insufficient attention is paid to land in climate change adaptation. She emphasized that it is not a matter of inventing solutions; many proven and effective measures exist, but they need to be brought to scale. She pointed out that, while climate change negotiations tend to center around the largest greenhouse gas emitters, when climate change is put in terms of land, the negotiation dynamics can change because all countries have major contributions to make. Barbut further stressed that every country should adopt the land degradation neutrality goal, adapting it to local circumstances.

Magda Lovei thanked the speakers, honored guests and organizers of the global observance of World Day to Combat Desertification. She remarked that the stimulating debates heard throughout the event demonstrate that there are many successes to learn from and much hope for further progress. Repeating the day's messages that commitments from the top, mobilization at the grassroots and the right policies are necessary to implement solutions, Lovei stated that "all the ingredients of success can be put in place" and "nature can heal itself if people do the right thing." She ended with an announcement that TerrAfrica will make another contribution to the UNCCD to continue their partnership, including for the Land for Life publication. The global observance event was closed at 4:18 p.m.

BOOK LAUNCH AND EXHIBITION

In addition to the speakers and panels, participants at the World Day to Combat Desertification global observance event participated in a book launch and photo exhibit, among other activities. During lunch and a reception following the event, participants viewed photos of desertification by George Steinmetz, National Geographic, and Andrea Borgarello, TerrAfrica, as well as the SAWAP Exhibit. Also during lunch, a trailer of the documentaries that Connect4Climate received in response to the Action4Climate contest for aspiring filmmakers was screened. The trailer features small snapshots of the films that feature stories of climate change and the implementation of solutions. Gustavo da Fonseca, GEF, announced and distributed a new report, titled "Combating Land Degradation in Production Landscapes through Integrated Ecosystem Management: A Portfolio Review of GEF Experience." The global observance event concluded with a reception during which Titi Music, a group from Senegal, performed songs on desertification and rural livelihoods.