



Combating Desertification

Germany's commitment to implementing the United Nations Convention (UNCCD) in the context of international cooperation

Land degradation: Shared responsibility for a worldwide problem

Land degradation is a process which is mainly human-induced. It diminishes the capacity of the land resource to fulfil its economic and ecological functions. It is accompanied by a loss of biodiversity in soils, vegetation and fauna, causes a decrease in potential agricultural and forestry yields, disrupts the water balance and curtails the supporting and regulating services of land.

Key drivers of land degradation processes are non-sustainable agricultural methods, deforestation and the sealing of landscapes.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) – adopted following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 – focuses primarily on land degradation in the world's drylands. Now it has become clear that land degradation not only impacts dryland areas and the developing countries, although most people in these areas are indeed very directly affected by the nexus of food insecurity, poverty and land resource loss.

Land degradation is a challenge of global proportions. It is closely linked to climate change. Agricultural land use and land-use changes are responsible for approximately 33 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, while at the same time climate change intensifies the drivers of land degradation. High population growth in agrarian countries and global competition for natural resources make land degradation a challenge at many levels: a challenge to worldwide food security, economic development,

social stability and human rights – particularly in the developing countries. Importantly, land degradation can also give rise to global security issues when people are forced to flee from affected regions.

LAND DEGRADATION AND DESERTIFICATION: A GLOBAL PROBLEM

- 24 per cent of the Earth's land area has been degraded over the last 25 years.
- Land degradation directly threatens the livelihoods of 1.5 billion people.
- More than 24 billion tonnes of fertile soil are lost due to inappropriate use each year.
- Land degradation affects both dry and humid regions of the Earth; the term desertification is used to describe land degradation in dryland areas.
 - It is estimated that 36 million km² of drylands (71 per cent of all dryland areas) worldwide are at risk of desertification.
 - Desertification threatens the economic and social development of more than 110 countries around the world.



Left: Working the fields in Mozambique

Right: Dry forest in the Piura region of Peru

Germany's contribution to combating desertification

Effective approaches and technologies aimed at sustainable land use and the rehabilitation of degraded areas do exist. To ensure their success, it is important that these focus directly on the people affected, within the scope of their needs, means and competencies. All land users and dimensions of sustainable land management should be considered as a whole, and solutions need to be developed jointly and adapted to local institutional conditions.

To ensure sustained and widespread success, activities at local level are coupled with the creation of a supportive general framework at national and international level. At provincial and municipal level, guidance and support is provided for strategy development, planning and investment measures. At the same time, lessons learned and success stories are analysed systematically and utilised to offer advice to policy-makers.

Introducing sustainable land management systems calls for cross-sectoral, transdisciplinary cooperation, often also across national borders. For this reason, German international cooperation promotes human capacity development and the systematic exchange of experience, as well as innovative partnerships between science and practice.

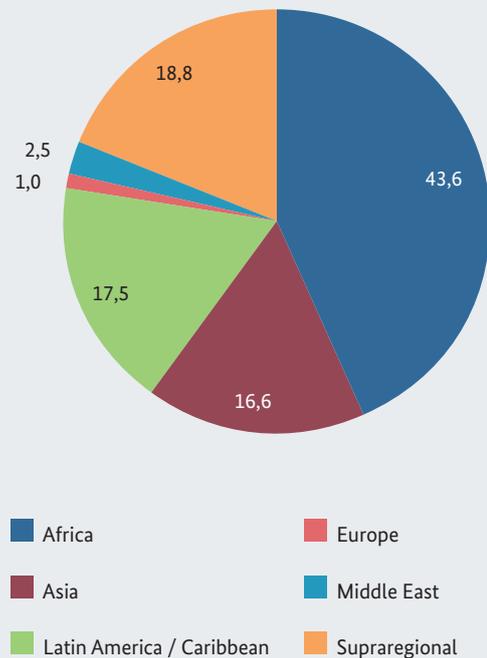
Areas of intervention, number and financial volume of projects supported in 2012 and 2013

Desertification is recognised as a global environmental issue. Germany's Federal Government invested some EUR 425 million into combating desertification during 2012 and 2013, involving more than 800 projects worldwide. For many of these projects mitigation of desertification is not the main focus, but an integral part of complex programmes in the fields of rural development and food security, protection of water catchment areas and biodiversity, preservation of ecosystem services, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Within the projects, this involves introducing technical innovations and promoting institutional solutions on the one hand, and helping to improve the general policy framework on the other. Such a multi-level approach is essential if sustainable, inclusive results are to be achieved.

The projects are predominantly bilateral or regional, but approximately 20 per cent of the funding in 2012 and 2013 went to 52 supra-regional projects.

During this period support was provided to 267 projects in Africa, 162 in Asia, 332 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 13 in the Middle East and seven in Europe.

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDING 2012 AND 2013 IN PER CENT



Practical examples

Producing wood for energy – combining land rehabilitation, climate change mitigation, local business development and governance

Most people in sub-Saharan Africa cook and heat with wood. During the decades to come, charcoal will continue to be the key source of energy in the ever-growing cities. As charcoal is almost always produced illegally, the consequences are forest degradation and land degradation.

In northern Madagascar, therefore, German development cooperation (DC) has developed an approach which combines the large-scale reforestation of degraded land for wood energy production with socio-economic benefits for the population. Some 9,000 hectares of plantation already supply a quarter of the charcoal used by the regional city of Antsirananana. This project is an impressive example of how combating desertification also contributes to climate protection, biodiversity preservation – among other things, by reducing the pressure on natural forests – and rural development. To ensure that the impact of such innovative approaches is as widespread as possible, German DC is also carrying them over to other countries.

Sustainable land management pays – an example from northern Peru

In the Piura region of northern Peru, the local population, associations and the regional government decided to collectively tackle the problem of desertification which was severely affecting the area. In the context of an Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative study, the partners received advice on integrating strategies of sustainable land management and desertification control in development and public budget plans. The results of the study showed that the economic cost of soil loss amounts to approximately 14 per cent of agricultural gross domestic product, with a total loss around USD 100 million. This strong argument convinced all stakeholders to jointly develop innovative approaches for the sustainable use and reforestation of dry forests. This was the significant motivation behind the Peruvian Government's decision to introduce a mechanism for payments for ecosystem services into national legislation in 2014.

A world without net loss of healthy land

In the past the issue of land degradation and desertification was largely restricted to the dryland areas covered by the UNCCD mandate. To date no international agreement has been adopted on guiding principles for land degradation outside these areas.

It was not until 2012 that the scope broadened: the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) recognises land degradation, desertification and drought as global challenges to sustainable development. Land degradation is considered to be closely related to global objectives such as food security, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation.

In view of global environmental and access goals it is becoming increasingly clear that not only the still intact land must be managed sustainably, but already degraded areas must also be rehabilitated. This was taken into account when the Land Degradation Neutral World (LDNW) objective was formulated, with the vision of a world in which land rehabilitation actions at least offset ongoing land degradation.



Anchoring the issue in the SDGs

LDNW stands to be included in the list of objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the UNCCD has begun preliminary work on implementing land degradation neutrality (LDN). An international working group is developing a definition and possible courses of action for LDN.

The UNCCD sees such inclusion in the SDGs as having great potential to lend a new dynamic and political relevance to the Convention. All countries will have to address land degradation mitigation and develop feasible approaches appropriate to their own circumstances.

Pilot programme to implement LDN

The UNCCD pilot project represents an important contribution to implementing the LDN concept. In 15 countries the national action plans (NAPs) to implement the UNCCD will be oriented towards the LDN objective. This sets the stage for mainstreaming the issues of land degradation, desertification and soil protection in cross-sectoral policy approaches. In addition, individual projects for land-use planning, land rehabilitation and other suitable measures are in preparation in selected areas. The experience gained from this approach will be conveyed to the Conference of the Parties and will inform cooperation with other environmental conventions.

Outlook – Germany's further activities to combat worldwide land degradation

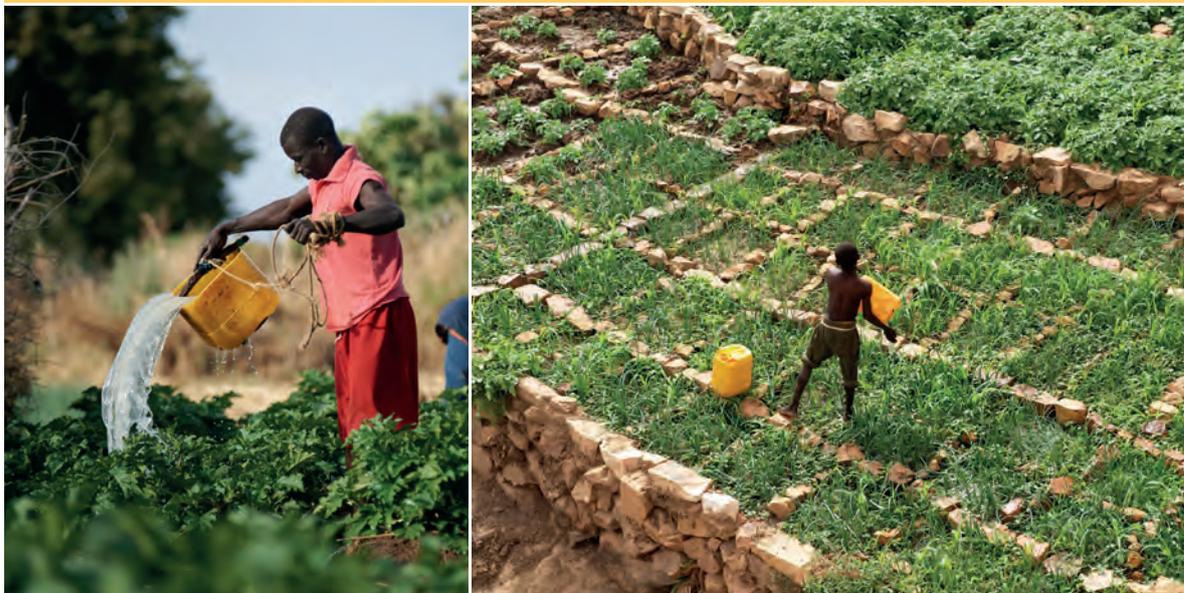
Soil conservation and rehabilitation

In early 2014 the BMZ launched its special "One World, No Hunger" initiative, bundling and significantly expanding its activities in the fields of agricultural innovation, food security, soil protection and land policy. It is making at least one billion euros available for this initiative each year.

Various global projects have been introduced within the framework of this special initiative, including the Soil Protection and Rehabilitation for Food Security programme, which promotes the sustainable management of natural resources in rural areas.

Smallholder production systems are the programme's key area of activity. This is where integrated soil fertility management technologies are to be anchored, while already degraded areas are to be rehabilitated. Human capacity development measures and networking with academia shall help to mainstream soil protection in agricultural and environmental policies. The programme includes a total of six measures in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India and Kenya.

Villagers engaged in reforestation work in Madagascar



Mali: Smallholders irrigating the land

Raising awareness of soil conservation and food security



To mark the International Year of Soils in 2015 the BMZ is funding the Germany-wide media campaign entitled "Soil. Sustains life." (*Boden. Grund zum Leben.*) Its aim is to raise awareness among the general public of the importance of soils as the basis of global food supply and vital ecosystem functions.

ELD Initiative 2.0

The costs of land degradation have been largely hidden in the profitability calculations of private companies and the public sector alike. The global Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative launched by the UNCCD, the BMZ and the EU helps to quantify the economic significance of soil conservation and sustainable land use. Its objective is to establish the economic valu-

ation of advancing land degradation as an integral component of political strategies and decision-making processes. The activities of a worldwide network of scientists and experts will draw the attention of decision-makers in politics and business, and the expert public, to the issue and equip them with assessment approaches. The vision of the initiative is to raise global awareness of the socio-economic value of healthy soil and promote sustainable land use.

The initiative, which will present its main report during 2015, the International Year of Soils and Sustainable Development Goals, has already made some progress. In Tunisia a dialogue was initiated between various ministries on the basis of the ELD approach, and the issue of land degradation has been integrated into ongoing policy formulation processes.

The initiative is attracting widespread interest and expanding its human capacity development activities. Apart from providing workshops and training courses for interested parties in various countries, along with substantive and strategic support for the Soil Leadership Academy established by the UNCCD and the private sector, an initial Massive Open Online Course (ELD-MOOC) has been carried out. A further course will continue in spring 2015.

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