

Desertification and Drought Day – ESCWA Celebration

ADG Talking Points

- “Food. Feed. Fibre. Sustainable production and consumption” is the theme of the 2020 Desertification and Drought Day to raise awareness on threats to the environment, particularly land loss resulting from the unsustainable production and consumption patterns. The theme links issues related to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12, “responsible production and consumption”, to those of SDG 15, “life on land”, which includes the issues of biodiversity and land degradation, among others.
- To meet the ever increase in human demand; it is estimates that by 2030, an additional 300 million hectares of land will need to be exploited for food production while the clothing industry will need an additional 115 million hectares.
- With deserts and unfertile land occupy about 70% of its total area, the Arab region has the lowest per capita availability of arable land in the world, with 86.7% of the region’s land is either desertified or threatened by desertification. Arable land constitute less than 5% of the total land in two-thirds of the countries of the region. Almost 90% of the region’s land is subjected to different forms of land degradation
- The First Arab Report on the Arab States' Efforts to Combat Desertification and Achieve Land Degradation Neutrality by the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) estimated that 60% of the region’s lands are already degraded by varying degrees (26% highly degraded, 43% degraded, 25% moderately degraded and 15% lightly degraded).
- Land degradation is more challenging for rain-fed agriculture land in the Arab region. Out of the region’s 30 million hectares of rain-fed crop land, 73% is estimated to be degraded.
- The annual economic cost of land degradation is estimated at USD\$ 9.0 billion (2.1 – 7.4% of the region’s GDP). Salinity in the soil reduces productivity and crop yields, causing economic losses estimated at \$1 billion annually across the region (ASDR 2020).
- The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the vulnerability of the agricultural system in the region and the serious need for actions to enhance the resilience of the agricultural and food production system. In its medium and long term plan for sustainable recovery after COVID-19, RNE is focusing on restoring land and protecting biodiversity, promoting healthy and sustainable diets.
- FAO is enhancing the capacities of countries in the region for building sustainable land management systems and in restoring degraded lands through its normative and field programmes.

- FAO developed a number of tools and approaches for assessment, mapping and monitoring the types, drivers and status of deforestation, land degradation and land use/land cover change. For example, FAO developed Collect Earth as open access geospatial tool for monitoring and assessment of land use/land cover changes and trained national experts in many countries in the region on its use.
- In collaboration with the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT), FAO implemented a project on Decision Support for Mainstreaming and Scaling out Sustainable Land Management (DS-SLM). The goal of the DS-SLM project is to help halt and reverse global trends of land degradation.
- FAO announced the Great Green Wall for Cities initiative that aims to support nature-based solutions to climate change. The initiative builds on the Great Green Wall initiative to combat climate change and desertification and address food insecurity and poverty, by creating a mosaic of green and productive landscapes and livelihood system options across North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Jordan is among the selected countries for piloting the Great Green Wall for Cities initiative.
- Sand and dust storms represent a significant transboundary hazard in numerous parts of the world, including in the Arab countries, To address the issue, FAO has secured funding for a one-year inter-regional project on “Catalyzing investments and actions to enhance resilience against Sand and Dust Storms in agriculture”. The project covers six countries with three from the region (Iraq, Kuwait and Algeria). Based on the learnings from this project, a large-scale follow-up programme will be designed to scale-up resilience building to sand and dust storms.
- Through mobilized resources from the GEF, FAO is providing policy and technical support to a number of countries in the region, including to Iraq, Jordan, Sudan, Algeria, Mauritania Egypt and Yemen, in the area of sustainable land management, restoration of degraded landscapes, sustainable forest management, conservation of agrobiodiversity and strengthening the resilience of the pastoral systems.
- FAO is assisting countries in the region in accessing GCF funding for increasing resilience to address the climate change impacts in this respect FAO supporting Jordan ,Mauritania Algeria Syria, Yemen and Sudan.
- FAO is supporting Morocco and Lebanon in upscaling forest and landscape restoration to achieve their Nationally Determined Contributions through an interregional project funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany.

- In conclusion, in order for the Arab region to ensure a sustainable future, it is vital to seriously consider and adopt robust science/policy interface, strong political will and effective partnership between all concerned stakeholders.