



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



## **ESCWA and FAO discuss regional production and consumption for sustainable land management**

*Regional talks commemorating Desertification and Drought Day*

**24 June 2020** – The Arab region needs to innovatively sustain its land and protect it from degradation and loss in order to ensure a sustainable future. This was the main message of the joint FAO-ESCWA celebration of Desertification and Drought Day under the theme “Food. Feed and Fibre” held virtually on Monday across the Arab region.

Representatives from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia ([ESCWA](#)) and the Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Office for Near East and North Africa ([FAO RNE](#)) joined experts, practitioners and academic institutions from different countries in exploring ways in which the region can become more resilient to address the risks arising from desertification, drought and the depletion of natural resources, in order to preserve terrestrial ecosystems, shift to more sustainable consumption and production patterns, prevent land degradation and rehabilitate agricultural land.

“Desertification and drought are serious challenges of the region where 92% of the land is arid while 73% of the limited arable land is subject to degradation. We pay high economic cost of land degradation exceeding 9 billion dollars each year,” said Roula Majdalani, Leader of the Climate Change and Natural Resources Sustainability Cluster at ESCWA.

“Desertification and drought are two critical issues for the Arab region as it is facing water shortages along with a growth in population amid a time of conflict and war in many countries,” said Serge Nakouzi, FAO Deputy Regional Representative, on behalf of Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region. “When we all work together to change our practices to more sustainable ones, only then will we see a future with enough healthy land to provide food security for all.”

### **Desertification and drought**

The quest to meet the growing needs of humans – be it food, clothing or space for settlement – in addition to climate change are the leading drivers of land degradation and desertification. The vicious cycle of unsustainable production and consumption patterns is expected to continue as the population keeps growing, changing the agricultural land use, and settles more and more into cities.

Safeguarding the increasingly challenged lands is paramount to ensuring current and future productive activities in support of food security and livelihood. The challenge is even greater in the Arab region, characterized by limited natural resources and fast degrading soils in an arid environment where a better stewardship of the land is urgently needed.

If the Arab region were to continue its current consumption rate, it would require the resources of about 4.2 Arab regions. This is due to the interlinked challenges of water scarcity, population growth, conflict and instability, dietary habits, and food loss and waste, as well as the expected adverse impact of climate change on the region. These challenges are proving detrimental to the region’s environment and the sustainability of the fragile and scarce natural resources, particularly land and water. The annual economic cost of land degradation in the Arab region has been estimated at \$9 billion (2.1 – 7.4% of the region’s



GDP). Salinity as a form of land degradation reduces productivity and crop yields, causing economic losses estimated at \$1 billion annually across the region.

To preserve these resources with the aim of improving livelihoods and the quality of life, there will be a need to revisit how land-degrading and water-depleting production systems, including for example rice, foraging, khat or animal husbandry, are conducted.

### **A sustainable future**

“Covid-19 gave Mother Nature a well-deserved break from our footprints on the environment with reduced social and economic activities. We have all enjoyed seeing clearer skies and breathing cleaner air during this lockdown. It taught us that we are all capable of consuming and producing less and still live well in harmony with nature, in fact live better.” added Majdalani.

“There is an urgency to act promptly, which becomes naturally evidenced by the alarming situation of the current Covid-19 pandemic. It is imperative to re-adjust human behavior to live in harmony with nature in a more sustainable World and Arab region. This is reasonably feasible, should we start instigating measures that adhere to the principles of responsible production and consumption, materialized on the ground by simple but efficient actions that proved to enhance both earth and human well-being.” added Nakouzi.

There are many such ways and initiatives in which we can protect our land, such as promoting agricultural practices that strengthen the land regenerative capacity, adopting innovative ways to improve soil fertility, use the limited water in more sustainable way, reduce post-harvest food loss and waste, planning for urban expansion and cities to ensure that they become more sustainable, and supporting the adoption of green technologies.

### **Desertification and Drought Day**

[Desertification and Drought Day](#) is observed every year on 17 June to promote public awareness of international efforts to combat desertification. This year’s observance is focused on changing public attitudes to the leading driver of desertification and land degradation: humanity’s relentless production and consumption.

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### **For more information**

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#### **Photo caption:**

Hallows are dug in the ground to gather water during the rainy season to fight drought and desertification.  
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