



United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification

EUROPEAN LAUNCH

UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR DESERTS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST DESERTIFICATION

16 DECEMBER 2010 LONDON, UK

Concept Note

Land Degradation, Desertification & Human Insecurity in the European Context

Time enough for change

The United Nations General Assembly declared the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010-2020) to promote action that will protect the drylands. The Decade is an opportunity to make critical changes to secure the long-term ability of drylands to provide value for humanity's well being. It runs from January 2010 to December 2020.

The European Regional Launch will be held in London, UK, on 16 December. The UK hosts a critical mass of NGOs, research, and advocacy organizations that support the sustainability of deserts and drylands ecosystems, and activities to combat land degradation and desertification.

The event will showcase prominent speakers from the UN, civil society, business and academia to consider, in the span of the decade (2010-2020): What are the best and worst case for deserts and drylands with regard to Europe? What does Europe need to do in order to reach the best case? What would be the perils of inaction for Europe and for the entire world? What is the role of the drylands for Europe and for global sustainability?

A sub-text of the discussion is that ***one decade is time enough for – positive – change***. The launch of the Decade in Europe is also viewed as an opportunity to better understand and share knowledge on these issues among stakeholders, who include communities, governments, NGOs, donors, international and intergovernmental organizations, the media and other actors.

The international community has a stake in the health of desert ecosystems and sustainable land management as a way to combat land degradation in drylands, not only because of their physical extent –accounting for 41% of the Earth's surface. Rather, there is growing recognition that there is no link between drylands and their biodiversity value, that drylands are key sources of social and political conflict around the world, and that they play a critical role in the climate systems. In essence, deserts and dryland ecosystems are increasingly considered critical to the global climatic, economic and geopolitical systems in the global futures. This is most obvious in climate change, thus the event is timed to coincide with the conclusion of the Cancun Climate Conference (UNFCCC COP 16). As such, the link to ***climate change adaptation and mitigation*** will be prominent in the discussion.



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Relevance of the Decade to Europe

The event will emphasise how deserts, drylands, land degradation and desertification are relevant to Europe, in three main ways:

1) Drylands in Europe:

- **Drylands exist within Europe itself:** 24% of Europe's terrestrial area is drylands. They are prevalent especially in Spain, Portugal and Italy, and parts of Central and Eastern Europe.
- It is predicted that over the next decades the drylandss across the world is likely to increase, in particular, across Eurasia, Africa and Australia.¹
- The Mediterranean region, a region affected by desertification, has been instrumental in the development of human civilisation. It counters the view of drylands as lacking potential.

2) Global drylands providing for Europe:

- **Europe relies on drylands for important products and services:** Drylands livestock producers in meeting a globally rising demand for meat, milk and other products (the 'livestock revolution').
- There is an increasing demand for innovative, unique or specialty products coming from drylands, worth globally about USD 65 billion per annum. A significant proportion of this demand is for medicinal and cosmetic products. Global trade (including industrial production) in aloe, a skincare product traditionally used in and originally sourced from drylands, is valued at about USD 80 million.
- Luxury products like cashmere come from drylands. Rising prices for cashmere wool have encouraged an increase in goat and yak herding in Mongolia since the transition to a capitalist economy from 1990, and in Tibet. The huge Chinese market is critical. Vicuña fibre from the high tropical Andes finds a valuable export market, especially in Italy, providing an important opportunity for rearing these animals as a part of the livelihoods of local communities.
- Europeans form a significant proportion of tourist to drylands, noting wildlife and cultural tourism in Africa, leisure tourists to southern Europe, and the Middle East.

¹ The National Science Foundation, USA (October 2010)

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- Many European mining, energy and other extractives, plus pharmaceutical and natural product companies are active in drylands.

3) Europe and global drylands are interconnected:

- **Europe is interconnected to drylands in developing countries:** Climatic interactions between drylands and global circulation systems, e.g., the export of Saharan dust; links between sea surface temperatures and African rainfall; El Niño effects on tropical rainfall. Europe relies on 'unseen' values of global drylands like carbon sequestration.
- Geopolitical interconnections, e.g., effects of poverty on illegal migration to Europe; insecurity in ocean shipping lanes; international costs of dealing with food emergencies; terrorist incubation in misgoverned and impoverished dryland countries; domestic conflicts with global consequences.
- Considerable support to drylands by European agencies, NGOs, academics: The cost of food aid is increasing, and far exceeds the cost of measures to improve local production.
- Revival of "Great Green Wall" afforestation project in the Sahel promoted by West African heads of state with the support of the European Union.

Focus of the Presentations

The speakers will aim to:

- Present the importance of the Decade's theme from a challenging perspective based on their own realms of expertise and influence
- Stimulate advocacy and action by stakeholders to support drylands
- Provide a specific message for the media on the significance of the Decade

The time limit for each speaker's remarks during the seminar is 10 minutes. There will be two sessions with 4 or 5 speakers each, followed by a moderated discussion session.

Discussion will focus, primarily, on:

- What are the most important trends and pressures affecting drylands, of particular relevance to Europe?
- What is the best-case scenario for drylands by the end of this UN Decade? What are the actions necessary to reach the best-case scenario?
- What would be the perils of inaction for Europe and for the entire world?



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- What is the role of the drylands for Europe and for global sustainability?

Target Audience

Participants from all over Europe have been invited to the event, although it is expected that a majority will come from the community in the UK, especially London, focused on drylands issues. The participants will be drawn from governmental and non-governmental organizations, academic and research institutions, international and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and the media communities. Therefore, presentations are tailored to a general audience, with content of interest to the media as well.