

On World Day to Combat Desertification, UN shines spotlight on 'true value' of land

Land is not a limitless resource and ignoring its role in our everyday lives threatens food and water supplies, biodiversity and the security of us all, the United Nations agency that fights desertification worldwide has said.

In a statement marking the [World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought](#), the head of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification ([UNCCD](#)) said that everyone needed to recognize the true value of land.

"I would ask you: when you choose what to eat, what to wear or what to drive, think about how your choice impacts the land – for better or for worse," said Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary, in her message for the day, marked on 17 June.

Land-grabbing, unplanned urban sprawl, unsustainable agriculture and over-consumption can yield quick economic gains, but such short-sightedness eventually causes degradation and loss of critical ecosystem services due to unsustainable land use.

As a result, a third of the world's usable land has already severely degraded over the last 30 years, with 75 billion tons of soil from arable land lost annually, said UNCCD.

However, the UNCCD says everyone can contribute to, and benefit from, investing in sustainable land management – as consumers, producers, corporations or governments. Farmers can invest in smart agriculture with higher yields but reduced pesticides. Policymakers and land managers can invest in sustainable land management while consumers can choose to spend on organic and fair-trade products that avoid ruining the land.

The UN General Assembly established the World Day in 1994 to promote public awareness of land degradation and to draw attention to the implementation of the UNCCD – the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. The World Day is observed annually on 17 June, the date the UNCCD was adopted.

This year's theme for the Day is "Land has true value – invest in it." The campaign hopes to promote changes in behaviour and adoption of more efficient planning and practices, to ensure there are sufficient land resources for the world's long-term sustainability and economic prosperity.