



UNCCD News

A bi-monthly update on the work of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Issue 2,2 | March-April 2010

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Bolivia's dream of green energy pre-eminence

A modest, self-reliant start this year to mining the world's largest-known reserves of lithium is raising hopes in rural communities that they, too, will profit. But government mistrust of multinational companies will keep foreign investors cautious and may prevent the country, the second-poorest in the hemisphere, from rapidly exploiting the world's growing demand for alternative fuels. **Page 5**

This hardcopy version of *UNCCD News* contains only selected hyperlinks. See the fully linked version online at <http://newsbox.unccd.int>

Events in Asia, Americas and Europe to mark World Day with focus on soil biodiversity

June 17 marks World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, the UNCCD's annual event to draw public attention around the world to the crucial importance of healthy soil. The World Day was called into being by a United Nations General Assembly decision in 1994. Since then, Parties to the Convention, UN organizations, international and non-governmental organizations and other interested stakeholders have celebrated this particular day with a series of outreach activities worldwide.

2009 set a new record, with at least 50 World Day activities staged in 30 countries, from tree-planting ceremonies to concerts. This year's World Day theme, “Enhancing soils anywhere enhances life anywhere”, echoes the International Year of Biodiversity by pointing out the richness and diversity of insects, microorganisms and bacteria in healthy soil and their contribution to food security and other ecosystem services.

Some planned World Day events in 2010:

Bonn: The German government and the UNCCD secretariat will observe the Day this year at the Koenig Natural History Research Museum in Bonn. The museum will open a new exhibit on deserts and desertification and host a panel discussion with and for youth participants, children's events and a show by drylands photographer Michael Martin.

Shanghai: The Shanghai Expo UN Pavilion Forum Area will see the Chinese government and the UNCCD secretariat team up with the China Youth Federation and the Future Forest Foundation of South Korea in an array of song and dance performances, films and presentations on successful projects to combat desertification.

Santo Domingo: With an eye on the massive reconstruction and recovery effort underway in neighbouring Haiti, the government of the Dominican Republic plans a high-level meeting with Haitian officials, a conference on the regional economic impact of desertification and a tour of land rehabilitation projects in the border area. “This will show how we are responding together to desertification on the island of Hispaniola”, says Jaime David Fernández Mirabal, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

The UNCCD Secretariat will report on further country activities on the WDCD web pages.

Rich soil
biodiversity
means productive
livelihoods and
ecosystems



Healthy land supports healthy life

That is a message well worth repeating in this International Year of Biodiversity. Conserving flora and fauna on land is impossible without conservation of their foundational habitat. Core ingredients of healthy land-based ecosystems include the soil bacteria and a teeming mass of other organisms that foster vegetation growth, which nourishes and shelters the species that inhabit our planet.

“Land as the missing link” was the subject of a presentation I made recently to an audience of development experts in Germany. Yes, soil is no less an essential element of the environmental equation than biodiversity and climate. And sustainable land management is the necessary action that springs from that realization, just as controlling greenhouse gas emissions is our response to global warming and preserving ecosystems our response to species extinction. But matters don’t end there: these three things are intimately intertwined and are best tackled as a whole.

Two important “Days” A narrow approach to one element – climate change, desertification or biodiversity – in isolation from the other two means treating symptoms, not causes. More than ever, national governments, civil society and the donor community need coordinated enactment of the UN’s three great multilateral environmental conventions within the framework of their national development programmes.

This is the central message of Land Day 2, the second of the UNCCD’s annual policy forums scheduled for 5 June 2010, during the 32nd session of the subsidiary bodies (SB32) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Less than two weeks later, on 17 June, our annual World Day to Combat Desertification is a fresh opportunity to reflect on ways and means to advance the fight against land degradation.

Our new battle plan: showing results More than two years have passed since COP8 adopted The Strategy in Madrid. What have we achieved to date? The Secretariat has put into effect a new, more efficient and results-oriented management structure. The Convention’s regional coordination mechanisms have become operational in the field, to enhance the ground-level effectiveness of National Action Programmes (NAPs). And the joint work programme between the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) has been finalized, with an array of projects designed to mobilize finance to fight drought, land degradation and desertification and promote sustainable land management.



Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary

“For generations, land has remained one of the most important assets for wealth creation through food production, mineral development, medicine extraction and as a security instrument for investment [...] But it is the life forms below ground level that confer on the land much of its potential productivity.”

From Concept Note,
World Day to Combat
Desertification,
17 June 2010

INTERVIEW

WWF’s new President: “We have not fully realized that it’s all connected”

Yolanda Kakabadse is the new President of WWF, the global conservation organisation. Among her other duties in worldwide environmental governance, she is Chair of the Advisory Board of Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano, a board member of the Ford Foundation and member of the Environmental Advisory Board of CocaCola. She has a long-term perspective on the UN’s three multilateral environmental conventions, having coordinated civil society participation in the 1992 Earth Summit that launched them. From 1996 to 2004 she was President of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The daughter of Georgian émigré and an Ecuadorian mother, Ms Kakabadse also served as the Minister of Environment for Ecuador between 1998 and 2000. After taking up leadership of the WWF earlier this year, she spoke with Timothy Nater.

On the three Rio Conventions

I feel that public perception of the three UN environmental conventions today is in many ways a faithful reflection of global politics. The world’s priorities at present still tend to put business before people. So, top priority is given the Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol. It is seen as directly affecting industrial investment, the regulation of energy and other emissions-generating industries, the development of new technologies and jobs. The FCCC has drawn the attention of most of the world’s decision makers precisely because of its economic and legislative impact on countries.



“Climate change is a result of our lack of will and capacity to protect all of the planet’s valuable resources in a coordinated and integrated way.”

The Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) is seen as perhaps the least influential of the Conventions to date. It deals particularly with Africa, widely regarded as the weakest region of the world. It addresses poverty and related issues that developed countries feel are less relevant to them. The CCD has to struggle to attract major funding, and what finance is made available is often granted more in a spirit of charity than with a vision of the importance of rehabilitating degraded soils in Africa and other affected regions of the world.

Between the two is the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which is significant in relation to countries like Brazil, India or Indonesia with large natural ecosystems of global relevance, but biodiversity’s prominence in world media comes and goes, depending on events.

As a world community we have not fully realized that it’s all connected, that a major cause of the deterioration of global resources is our mismanagement of ecosystems and deforestation. Climate change is a result of our lack of will and capacity to protect all of the planet’s valuable resources in a coordinated and integrated way.

On WWF

I can compare it to another big organization I ran, the IUCN, which is a hybrid structure of both non-governmental organizations and government members. One of the IUCN’s strengths is its enormous potential to influence policy through the governments that make up its rather hybrid membership. However, seeking that consensus is time-consuming. One great asset of WWF, as a large NGO with no government members, is its freedom and flexibility. We can react within hours to events, jump into debates and discussions with the support of our civil society members and the independent funding that we raise.

WWF also has a worldwide network that can generate interest and excitement, share lessons good and bad and develop replicable models of action. Of course, WWF has to make choices. For example, do we look at areas that have been degraded and need to be restored, or do we focus on those that are still intact? Although we do both, my sense is that we tend to identify and work on those remaining healthy ecosystems that urgently, urgently need to survive and have the best chance of doing so.

On desertification

It’s important not to limit the message too much to the drama of drought and cracked earth and starvation. A positive, upbeat approach is important. The agenda of the UNCCD is quite complex so effective marketing and strategy is essential for its relevance in the world. I believe the potential for public-private collaboration is there and it is growing, for example in academia and business. UN agencies like UNCTAD, UNDP and UNEP are already building strategies with business leaders, very often through small- or medium-scale projects, focusing on local culture, traditions, products and practices.

On the International Year of Biodiversity

We all need to raise the profile of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Unfortunately, too often the decision makers of the world invest in short-term, politically expedient things. But the longer term is what matters. The health of any ecosystem has a direct relationship to the health of society. Healthy ecosystems harbor societies with a bright future. Degraded ecosystems leave societies on a downward spiral.

On the green economy

The first image in my mind is agricultural production. We are seeing so many clear, new examples that are reversing the trend towards growing dependence on fewer and fewer standard food items worldwide. Organizations, entrepreneurs and individuals are recuperating traditional knowledge and going back to what the land used to produce, generating new markets and opening access to globalization for communities that were excluded from it before. Good entrepreneurship should benefit as many people as possible. It implies taking the best care of ecosystems, water use and water sources and being much more effective in the care of the land and all that the land requires.



The giant panda's worldwide reach

WWF is one of the world's largest independent conservation organizations, and, for many, the most respected. Its black-and-white giant panda logo also makes WWF one of the world's most widely-recognized brands.

Independent foundation set up in 1961 under Swiss law, based in Gland, near Geneva.

Mission: To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature

Active in more than 100 countries on all continents

Over 5 million supporters worldwide

Funded by voluntary contributions from a wide variety of donors, including government and business, though about 60% of funding comes from individuals

2009 income: EUR 443,804,000. Since its inception WWF has invested over EUR 7 billion in more than 11,000 projects in more than 100 countries and leveraged many times more that amount in complimentary financial investments. It runs more than 1,400 projects at any one time

Staff: About 5,000 people worldwide in full and part-time positions

WWF cooperates with UN organizations, the IUCN, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, business and industry

ROUND-UP

Haiti

'Uninhabitable' countryside stalls effort

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) announced in mid-April that rapid relocation of Haiti's 1.6 million homeless earthquake victims away from overcrowded urban areas was impossible because of the country's profoundly degraded soil. IFRC's local Head of Operations Iain Logan said, "One of the greatest shortages is land fertile enough to support new homesteads." For now, tents and pre-fab huts can offer only temporary shelter from the advancing rainy season. IFRC spokesman Paul Conneally told UNCCD News, "Deforestation has made much of Haiti uninhabitable. Land is the issue in Haiti."



Guatemala

Drought-fighting funds less than one-tenth of what's needed

The United Nations and its aid partners in early March called for \$34 million to fight the country's worst drought in three decades. The money is for national relief efforts, food distribution, healthcare, agriculture and early recovery. However, a month later less than 10 percent of that amount had been received. 43 per cent of Guatemala's children are malnourished, and starvation has been reported in the worst-hit "corredor seco" (dry corridor) in the south-east and centre of the country. "It's all made worse by high food prices and the world recession, which means a sharp drop in money from relatives working abroad", says Elizabeth Sagastume, a World Food Programme (WFP) spokesperson in Guatemala.



China

Orange haze, up in my brain

Dust storms returned with a vengeance to Asia this spring. Whipped up by winds across drought-stricken and degraded land in western China, the storm that peaked on 22 March afflicted some 800,000 sq. km, including Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula – an area inhabited by 250 million people, according to the Xinhua News Service. Beijing issued a rare level-five air hazard warning and hunkered down (right). Not all was gloom, however: China's ambitious anti-desertification drive includes a major gathering, outside the capital in mid-May, of rock stars, politicians and thousands of young Chinese, Koreans and UNCCD representatives to promote land restoration measures.





“The Saudi Arabia of lithium”: The market for potash and boron harvested from the 12,000 sq. km. Salar de Uyuni could be dwarfed by global industry’s appetite for a new energy treasure waiting to be tapped here.

PRACTICE

A mining bonanza for Bolivia’s drylands?

The people of Bolivia’s impoverished southern Altiplano hope to profit from the world’s richest known reserves of lithium, already the main component of most rechargeable batteries in consumer electronics and now destined to be the driving force in hybrid and zero-emission electric vehicles.

The Salar de Uyuni is a remnant of a vast prehistoric sea that once stretched across the present-day borders of Chile, Argentina and Bolivia. Despite a gasp-inducing altitude of 3,650 meters, the blinding white light, hot springs and pink flamingos have long made these salt flats – the world’s largest – into a tourist attraction.

Yet a far more lucrative activity could soon transform the region. Lithium extraction from brine is scheduled to start in the government-owned Uyuni pilot project this year, and the beneficiaries of the blossoming market for this light, silvery metal and its derivatives could include local inhabitants who live in huts with no electricity and earn a meagre living from llama herding, subsistence farms and small-scale salt harvesting. Francisco Quisbert, a 65-year old indigenous union activist who is close to Bolivian President Evo Morales, told Bloomberg News in December 2009: “We have this dream. Lithium could bring us prosperity.”

Escape from oil dependence Governments and business everywhere are under intense pressure to reduce dependence on oil and cut carbon emissions. Progress towards both goals could greatly accelerate with the advent of “pure electric” and hybrid vehicles, in which – for now, at least – lithium carbonate batteries are considered the most efficient propellant. Chile, Argentina and China are currently the world’s largest producers of the mineral, but Bolivia’s output could dwarf that of the current leading players. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) in 2007 estimated the lithium reserves under the Salar de Uyuni, first discovered in 1976, at 5.4 million tons, practically half of all the known lithium deposits in the world.

About 75 percent of commercial lithium still goes into glass and ceramics manufacture, lubricants and anti-depression medication. But according to Carlos Ghosn, chief executive of Japan’s Nissan Motor Co., by 2020 one in 10 new cars – over 6 million vehicles – could be powered by lithium batteries, doubling present levels of global demand for the mineral. With such dazzling prospects, some prospective investors have put Bolivia’s energy future on par with present-day oil producer Saudi Arabia.

“Social control” Bolivia is the second-poorest nation in Latin America and the region around the Uyuni salt flats is among the poorest in the country. Many ordinary Bolivian’s have felt bypassed by the exploitation of the country’s silver, tin, oil and gas resources under previous governments, and President Evo Morales, himself an Aymara Indian from the Altiplano, appears determined to ensure they profit from lithium this time. The 2009 Bolivian Constitution makes natural resources “the

“This government project aims primarily at improving the living conditions of the people in the region.”

Cesar Augusto Altamirano, UNCCD National Focal Point in Bolivia



Woman at a market in Uyuni

exclusive dominion of the Bolivian people, administered by the state”. No surprise, then, that the regional peasants union FRUTCAS in February this year staked its claim for “social control” of the \$5.7 million Uyuni pilot project.

Once that pilot project is up and running, the government has promised another \$350 million for a full chemical production complex, due in 2013. Ownership would remain entirely in the hands of the state. Bolivia thus hopes to rake in the proceeds as an alternative-fuel producer of global proportions – and communities around Uyuni could see a bonanza of new roads, electricity, schools and jobs.

Says the UNCCD’s National Focal Point Cesar Augusto Altamirano, an official at the Ministry of the Environment and Water in La Paz: “Bolivia faces the challenge of developing an energy industry that will produce no greenhouse gas emissions and can thus mitigate the effects of climate change and desertification. This government project aims primarily at improving the living conditions of the people in the region. It will generate employment in both its investment and implementation phases, as well as income from lithium exports that will benefit all Bolivians”.

Constraints make investors cautious But there are challenges ahead. Mining will have an as-yet unknown impact on the fragile ecosystem. The state as sole owner must contend with a lack of lithium mining expertise at national level plus the heavy cost of improving access roads and local infrastructure in one of the remotest regions of the continent.

Furthermore, although the Bolivian leadership seeks foreign investors to help build factories for on-site lithium-ion battery production and even electric vehicles, multinational suitors (including Japan’s Mitsubishi, South Korea’s Lucky Goldstar and France’s Bolloré group) are cautious. And elsewhere on the political front, a Bolivian push to export lithium may deepen the landlocked country’s historic rivalry with neighbouring Chile, presently the world’s number-one lithium producer and the nearest access for Bolivian exports to the sea.

However, the desire for self-determination runs strong. “All our riches brought us in the past was more impoverishment”, Marcelo Castro, director of the Uyuni pilot plant, told the French magazine *Altermondes* in 2009. “We saw nothing but pillage and we don’t want history to repeat itself. Multinationals, monopolies... no, frankly, we’d prefer to do this ourselves.”

The lure of lithium

New technologies come and go, but lithium today is considered the best raw material for making rechargeable electric batteries. Lithium-ion (li-ion) batteries already power most of the world’s laptops, mobile phones and cameras. They are becoming increasingly common in household appliances ranging from TV remote controls to electric tools. In industry, very large li-ion battery arrays may soon be storing energy from wind and solar power plants.

It is the transport sector, however, that seems set to make lithium one of the hottest assets in the hunt for alternative fuels. Chinese, Japanese, US and European makers of hybrid cars as well as pure electric vehicles (PEVs) are likely to favour li-ion over nickel batteries, given the former’s lighter weight and longer storage capacity. The trend is approaching faster than some think. A 2009 estimate by the consulting firm Price-waterhouseCoopers said that the world’s auto companies, whose output accounts for about 15% of global carbon emissions, will introduce 42 new plug-in and electric models by 2012.



The highlands are drylands

According to Bolivia’s Ministry of the Environment and Water, 45 per cent of Bolivian territory is undergoing a relentless process of desertification. Agricultural, forestry and infrastructure losses are valued at more than 500 million dollars a year and the desertification is taking a particular toll on the indigenous communities of the high plains, or Altiplano. Studies by the government, scientists and indigenous activists suggest that deforestation, salinization and compaction of soils, expansion of the farming frontier, overgrazing, and inappropriate use of irrigation and drainage systems are the causes.

New action plan However, Bolivians are fighting back. In late April, following the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, the government launched a National Programme of Afforestation and Reforestation that in a first step foresees the planting of 10 million trees a year and is founded upon the country’s National Action Plan to Combat Desertification and Mitigate Drought and the objectives of the UNCCD.

Assembly of a lithium-ion battery in a General Motors plant, USA

“Lithium is a very important commodity,” Renault CEO Carlos Ghosn told Bloomberg News last year. “Obviously, we’re going to need to import a lot of it. Countries that have reserves of lithium are going to benefit.”

Tourism's up. So is the garbage

Much is already known about plastic refuse in the world's oceans – most of it horrifying. But plastic waste is piling up on land, as well. In the world's drylands and deserts, it increasingly disfigures landscapes, threatening plant life, livestock and livelihoods. Slowly, individual citizens are responding.

From the southwestern states of the USA to the Arabian peninsula, tourists and trash are coming to the drylands, boosting local economies but threatening just as quickly to destroy eco-tourism's opportunities. A combination of cheap air travel, thoughtless vacationers, poorly-trained guides and marauding 4x4 vehicles are prompting calls for better environmental management of once-pristine destinations.

Some countries are taking matters seriously. The US state of Nevada, for example, fines waste-dumpers up to \$6,000. South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and other countries have cut back on plastic shopping bags, which clog drains, snag in trees and defile thousands of square kilometres of bush, rangeland and national parks. India's Ministry of Tourism in March this year made government support for projects conditional on concrete plans for wayside rubbish collection points on highways and other routes to tourist destinations.

The world's deserts are particularly vulnerable. "Desert tourism is growing fast, but the tolerance threshold for visitor numbers in these ecosystems is not high", the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) warned in 2006. Understandably, many authorities are reluctant to forego the income that limiting tourist numbers would imply. To help spread the burden, ordinary citizens are rolling up their sleeves and taking action themselves. Three examples from the African continent and the Middle East:

Morocco: Local self-help Ali Sbai is the head of Zaila, a Swiss-based NGO devoted to eco-tourism in southern Morocco. "Deserts and glaciers are like empty radar screens", says Mr Sbai. "Drop anything into them, whether a plastic bottle or an empty soft drink can, and it sticks out very visibly." He has organized clean-up operations with the help of several hundred local volunteers around M'hamid, a village on the fringes of the Sahara, where refuse dumps dot the landscape.

Local inhabitants are shaping some of the plastic waste into reusable artifacts or recycling cast-off tyres into sandals. But the main approach so far has been incineration and burial – basic by any standard but preferable to leaving the garbage piled up under open skies. "Desert pollution is a symptom of globalization of consumer goods", says Mr Sbai, "and also the globalization of our human stupidity."



"Over the 10 years I've been living and working in Morocco, I've seen plastic pollution grow from a few bags blowing across the Sahara to clogged rivers and watersheds everywhere, from a few bags left by roadsides to huge dumps in ravines and gorges. I believe people learn and are encouraged by example."

Canadian tour operator Robbin Yager, who spends days picking up plastic waste and encouraging clients to do likewise

Egypt: Trash-picking tourists Sa'ad Ali runs Badawiya Expedition and Travel, based in the oasis village of Qasr al-Farafra, about 315 miles south-west of Cairo. "In recent years tourism in the desert has exploded and could have a severe impact on the desert in the next few years", his website says. "We want tourism to the oases to be able to grow without harming the delicate eco-system." Mr Ali offers free food and camping for a week every summer to Egyptian and foreign volunteers who will trek on foot through the heat and pick up trash in the White Desert, a spectacular attraction visited – and left strewn with rubbish – by an estimated 45,000 tourists a year.

"We have been arranging trips to clean up the desert for years now", Mr Ali says. "Every year, we had to pick up more and more rubbish until we started to train the guides and the tour operators in Cairo." The effect was startling. He reports that the amounts of desert rubbish his volunteers collected dropped from 11 tons to 4.5 tons between 2006 and 2007.

United Arab Emirates: Deadly for camels Dr Ulrich Wernery is scientific director at the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory in Dubai. A resident of the UAE for over 20 years, the German expatriate says that hundreds of camels starve to death each year due to balls of hardened plastic, some weighing up to 60 kilos, that accumulate in their stomachs from browsing on the plastic bags tossed from cars or dumped in the desert. Eventually, the accumulated rubbish in their stomachs leaves no room for food. "One in every two camels dies from plastic," Dr Wernery told Gulf News, an English-language daily newspaper, last July. Also affected are donkeys, cattle, sheep, goats, gazelles, ostriches and bustards.

Dr Wernery told the newspaper he had recently visited a desert area in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah where owners had dumped the bodies of animals killed by ingesting plastic. "I counted more than 30 carcasses and I named the place 'Death Valley'", he said. The UAE aims to ban plastic bags in 2013.

See UNEP's Tourism and Deserts -- A Practical Guide to Managing the Social and Environmental Impacts in the Desert Recreation Sector, published in 2006, the International Year of Deserts and Desertification



Volunteer tourists serve as clean-up crew in Egypt's White Desert



W'iláh, don't eat that

Under scrutiny: Discarded plastic in soil

Bisphenol A (BPA), a petrochemical derivative, is used in the manufacture of plastic bottles, the interior coating of food and drink cans and other widely-used consumer products. More than 2.2 million metric tonnes of it are produced worldwide each year. BPA, an endocrine disruptor, has estrogen-mimicking properties and has been proven to cause foetal deformity and other serious disorders in rats and mice. Since the 1990s, certain governments and regulatory agencies have been working to establish whether, as suspected by some medical authorities, exposure to BPA is linked to brain disorders, reproductive problems, obesity and other diseases in humans.

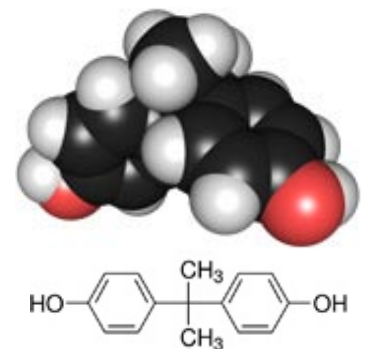
Canada and Denmark, for example, have moved to ban the use of BPA in baby bottles. A number of manufacturers in Europe and elsewhere have stopped using BPA in food packaging. And the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) are convening experts in October this year to assess the safety of BPA.

Also 'Bad for Plants and Animals' Now, the spotlight is turning to the ever-growing prevalence of plastic in garbage piles. Concern is mounting that BPA and other components of plastic are poisoning the environment, as well. The bulk of discarded plastic does not biodegrade. Instead, sunlight gradually breaks it down into smaller and smaller particles, a process called photodegradation. But this plastic "dust" will take centuries to disappear, according to experts, and BPA and other dangerous chemicals leach out of it over time.

A widely-noted study by Tulane University, Louisiana, in 2001 demonstrated the threat of BPA's contamination of soil to agriculture: the compound apparently interferes with nitrogen fixation at the roots of leguminous plants (peas, beans, soy, alfalfa, etc.). Buried plastic waste could thus render earth infertile.

It may well be harming earth-dependent organisms, as well. In July 2009, a review by the UK's Royal Society of the biological effect of BPA and phthalates in plastic on worms, insects, amphibians and other creatures concluded that BPA affected reproduction in all animal groups studied.

EPA eyes BPA In late March 2010, the Environmental Protection Agency of the US government announced it was placing BPA – also found in storage bins, computers, mobile telephones and many products made of rigid synthetic materials – on its "list of chemicals of concern".



Bisphenol A in buried plastic waste could be rendering earth infertile, as well as harming earth-dependent organisms and damaging the environment

The EPA said that “more than one million pounds” (over 450 metric tons) of BPA are released into the environment in the USA every year. Much of this winds up in the soil. The government body is now moving to determine the concentration levels of BPA in ground water, drinking water and surface water, and require plastics manufacturers in the USA to provide test data to help it evaluate possible long-term impacts on the growth, reproduction and development of aquatic organisms and wildlife.

LINKS AND RECENT PUBLICATIONS



UNCCD Global Mechanism

Central African states could stem billion-dollar annual losses through proper land and forest management, says a new study by the Global Mechanism (GM): http://news.global-mechanism.org/archive.php?p=110986870_186768

Articles

\$60 million needed for “Barometer of Life” to widen world’s ability to track biodiversity, including neglected drylands species. IUCN press release (<http://www.iucnredlist.org/news/scientists-call-for-biodiversity-barometer>) and one-page article in *Science* magazine (http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/the_barometer_of_life_article.pdf)

Solar-powered drip irrigation enhances food security in the Sudano-Sahel; Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS); Free access: <http://www.pnas.org/content/107/5/1848.full>

Reports

Planning to Deliver: Making the Rio Conventions more Effective on the Ground – Climate Change, Biodiversity, Desertification; GTZ, 48 pages Download PDF at <http://www2.gtz.de/dokumente/bib/gtz2009-0191en-climate-change-biodiversity-desertification.pdf>

Europeans not well informed about biodiversity loss – European Commission moves to raise awareness; Press release and access to full Eurobarometer survey: <http://www.eumonitor.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=148024>

Photography

“The desert is the easy part” and “Water and Land in Sahel”, work in Niger and Burkina Faso by Italian photographer Alfredo Bini: http://www.alfredobini.com/gallery.cfm?cat=34&cat_des=Water%20and%20land%20in%20Sahel

Video

“How to Save the World” plus a full selection of other award-winning features from the Asia-Pacific Climate Change Video Contest, sponsored by the Asian Development Bank (ADB): <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Events/2009/Climate-Change-Video-Contest/default.asp>

About the UNCCD

Developed as a result of the Rio Summit, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a unique instrument that has brought attention to the land degradation affecting some of the most vulnerable people and ecosystems in the world. The UNCCD benefits from the largest membership of the three Rio Conventions and is increasingly recognized as an instrument that can make an important contribution to the achievement of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

For more information: Awareness Raising, Communication and Education Unit, UNCCD

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UNCCD News

UNCCD News is published by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and supported by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany

Editor: Timothy Nater: tim@crosslake.biz

Design: Rebus, Paris: <http://www.rebusparis.com>

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