



Issue 3.1 | January – February 2011

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China tackles drought crisis

A severe drought hit China's "breadbasket" this winter. The government did not wait for rain, but set about irrigating 13 million hectares of crops and cloud-seeding. Farmers still expect a good harvest of winter wheat, but water scarcity will remain a serious problem for China's northern provinces. [▶ page 8](#)

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Dryland products reach the fashion runways

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Meetings laid firm foundations for the future

The Parties' tremendous efforts, their commitment and strong desire for progress have certainly paid off. This issue provides a snapshot of the progress made and ingredients for the successful conclusion of both the second special session of the UNCCD's Committee on Science and Technology (CST S-2) and the ninth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC9) in February.

The CST S-2 session reviewed progress in refining the methodology and approaches to be applied to the impact indicators, which had been provisionally accepted by the COP during its last session in 2009. Discussion focussed on the relevance, accuracy and measurability of the initially proposed set of impact indicators and constitutes a significant step forward.

Progress on each of these points is vital because sound science is a prerequisite for good policymaking and technological innovation. As the international community has learned over the last four decades, reliable scientific evidence is indispensable if we are to take practical steps to combat the threats posed by desertification. The livelihoods of people living in the drylands, nearly one third of the global population, depend on a significantly greater collaboration with the scientific community. I urge all networks, institutions, agencies and scientific organisations that believe they can make a difference to lend their support to this endeavour. Professor Kellner, the current CST Chair, expounds on this in his interview.

In some respects, CRIC9 provided a remarkable approach to an intergovernmental process. A three-hour interactive plenary session was convened where Parties, civil society organisations (CSOs), observers and intergovernmental organisations freely exchanged views on the outcomes of the fourth reporting cycle of the Convention's implementation. Encouraged by the unconventional rules of the exchange, such as permitting to speak in a personal capacity, the fact that the exchange was not recorded and that interventions were limited to three minutes, over 40 speakers took the floor. The three 45-minute segments focused on financing, best practice and National Action Programmes (NAPs). As acknowledged during the exchanges and in the formal discussions, the new reporting process still has much room for improvement and the Parties are



“The stage is now set for the next round – the tenth Conference of the Parties (COP10) in Changwon, the Republic of Korea, is scheduled to take place from 10 to 21 October 2011.”

committed to making this improvement happen. It is envisaged that the PRAIS system will be made more user-friendly by providing a clearer methodology and building the capacity of those countries that require support with reporting.

Also evident was the continuous commitment of civil society organisations to the CST and CRIC sessions. Though small in number, with only 18 CSOs in attendance this time, the CSOs were visible and made valuable contributions. Every effort will be made to ensure maximum CSO participation at the upcoming UNCCD core events.

The stage is now set for the next round – the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) in Changwon, the Republic of Korea, scheduled to take place from 10 to 21 October 2011. I look forward to welcoming the Parties and as many other stakeholders as possible to COP10. I am confident that, from Changwon, we will bring home another victory against desertification, land degradation and drought.



Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary

POLICY

From theory to practice: Vitalising the UNCCD strategy

With the UNCCD accelerating its efforts to implement its strategy, close to 1,000 participants from governments, intergovernmental bodies and CSOs gathered for the second special session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST S-2) and the ninth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC9) in Bonn, Germany, from 16 to 25 February 2011.



Impact indicators

Buzzwords like impact and performance indicators swirled around the World Conference Center in Bonn during the CST S-2 session. The reason for the all-pervading excitement was as simple as it was far-reaching. In 2009, the UNCCD stakeholders embarked on developing indicators for measuring the strategic objectives of its 10-year strategy (2008-2018). In February, the time had come to review the progress made.

Hopefully by the end of this year, a first set of tools and methodologies to apply the impact indicators will be in place. They are vital to assess progress towards achieving the UNCCD strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 (see box). “We want to know where we stand today to set the right course for the future,” Elysabeth David, Knowledge Management Science and Technology coordinator in the UNCCD secretariat, explains. In practice, the indicators will enable the Parties to monitor and assess their vulnerability to biophysical and socio-economic trends in desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). By doing so, they could set up realistic targets to combat desertification, land degradation and mitigate the effect of drought. For instance, Parties might analyse how the land productivity in affected areas is changing over time and measure the changes in rural poverty.

“We want to know where we stand today to set the right course for the future.”

Elysabeth David,
UNCCD secretariat

Operational objectives of the UNCCD’s 10-year strategy

1. Advocacy, awareness raising and education
2. Policy framework
3. Science, technology and knowledge
4. Capacity building
5. Financing and technology transfer

Strategic objectives of the UNCCD’s 10-year strategy

1. To improve the living conditions of affected populations
2. To improve the condition of affected ecosystems
3. To generate global benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD
4. To mobilise resources to support implementation of the Convention through building effective partnerships between national and international actors

So far so good. But the difficulty lies in the detail. “What methodology do we have to adopt to measure indicators? What are the appropriate benchmarks?” These are just some of the questions facing the UNCCD. In an effort to address them, the Conference of the Parties in 2009 agreed on two mandatory impact indicators. These are a) the proportion of the population in affected areas living above the poverty line and b) the land cover status. Affected countries must report on these first two indicators in 2012. During the CST S-2 session, there was animated discussion of another nine optional impact indicators, with delegates eager to clarify the methodologies and baselines that ensure their effective application. It is envisaged that by 2018, UNCCD stakeholders will have gained enough evidence to determine whether land degradation is on the rise or decreasing and at what rate. They will also have a more realistic understanding of the targets that can or cannot be achieved. For instance, they will have developed a clear vision about the levels of degradation they are prepared to adapt to.

The development of these indicators breaks new ground. The UNCCD is the first of the three Rio Conventions to devise a complex impact assessment process, which could provide the other two Rio conventions – the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – with some useful pointers in future. “We are on the threshold of a paradigm shift,” is how Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, described the development.

However, the project will not mature by itself. It needs the commitment of all stakeholders and considerable resources and capacities to develop, test and validate indicators.

But the scope of the CST S–2 meeting went beyond this topic. It once again revealed the Parties’ driving ambitions to make the UNCCD a global authority on scientific and technological issues of relevance to desertification and land degradation. The current CST Chair, Klaus Kellner left no room for doubt, stressing that the UNCCD must be at the forefront and “the international organisations’ first port of call when it comes to evidence-based information for policy formulation and DLDD matters.”

But how can this goal be achieved? To answer this question, the Parties decided to build on participation and to set up an e-forum to discuss possible options. The feedback from the cyber-discussions on https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/UNCCD_KMS_english will provide crucial input for a White Paper that will suggest promising ideas to the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties in October.

Every UNCCD stakeholder possesses invaluable knowledge, for example on forestry, on adapting to changing living conditions or on rehabilitating degraded land. For the UNCCD, it is vital to pool this information and make it available to others so that they can benefit from their peers’ experience. For this purpose, the UNCCD secretariat is currently developing a knowledge management system with guidance from the CST Bureau. No question, the system should “complement existing ... systems and similar initiatives already available at the local, national, subregional, regional and global levels ... to ensure that the system is comprehensive, avoids



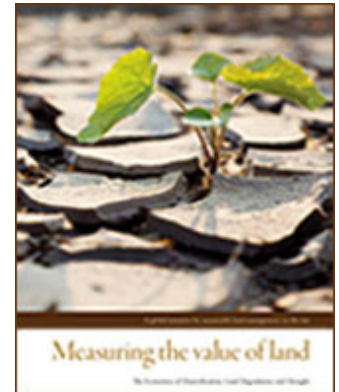
A knowledge management system will enable Parties to benefit from their peers’ experience.

duplication, reduces costs and benefits from past experience,” the report on the CST S-2 session emphasised. In addition, partnerships would be crucial in order to “benefit from the comparative advantage of the scientific institutions, United Nations agencies and other stakeholders when documenting and fostering exchange of best practices, traditional knowledge and any other relevant information”.

Paving the way for the 2012 Scientific Conference

Also with regard to the preparations for the second UNCCD Scientific Conference, things are moving forward. The Global Risk Forum (GRF), Switzerland, has been selected as the lead institution to organise the conference, working under the guidance of the CST Bureau.

The conference theme is “Economic assessment of desertification, sustainable land management and resilience of arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas”. The event will build on the UNCCD secretariat’s efforts to make the economic side of DLDD an integral part of policy strategies and decision-making. In December 2010, a group of 31 intergovernmental agencies, government ministries, donor organisations and private sector representatives met to discuss this issue and highlighted the need to gain clarity about the costs and benefits of sustainable land management.” “A strong alliance is needed to bring this initiative forward,” the conference summary entitled [Measuring the value of land](#) concludes. The Scientific Conference in 2012 is an ideal opportunity to foster this alliance.



Reporting progress

The CRIC9 was guided by one key question: How can the implementation of the Convention be progressed? Parties, UN agencies, intergovernmental organisations and CSOs provided insights into how they fulfil their UNCCD obligations. Some Parties’ commitment was truly impressive and served as an example of best practice. The efforts made by others revealed that the reporting system itself presents some challenges. But all reports submitted to the UNCCD illustrated that the stakeholders’ answers to desertification are as diverse as the challenges of desertification.

It is now or never for the action programmes to be brought in line with the strategy.



Moreover, while content mattered, methodology was deemed crucial too. This became especially apparent at the CRIC9 session where a new reporting process, the Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS), made its debut. Despite the need for improvement, delegates said that PRAIS was a significant step forward, not only for reporting but for the entire UNCCD implementation process. The heart of PRAIS is an interactive online portal to collate information on quantifiable actions towards the UNCCD’s 10-year strategy. According to Francisco Armando Gandia, Vice-State Secretary of the Environment and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Argentina and President of the Bureau of COP9, PRAIS contributes to more effective and better policymaking.

Although Parties regularly exchange ideas and experiences with each other, they primarily work along the lines of their National Action Programmes (NAPs). CRIC9 delegates agreed that isolated NAPs don't produce the desired results. "With seven years remaining for the implementation of the strategy, it is now or never for the action programmes to be brought in line with the strategy," said Richard Byron-Cox, NAP Alignment and Capacity Building Officer in the UNCCD secretariat. A Kick-Start Programme was officially launched during the CRIC9 session. It will provide assistance to 19 pilot countries and will run until August 2011.

No sidelining: side events showcase impressive initiatives

From the national anti-bushfire day in the Gambia to cooperation management in Brazil and the European Commission's research projects – the side events at the CST and CRIC meetings provided a forum for Parties and observer organisations to put the spotlight on issues they wanted to share.

The presenters often engaged their audiences in stimulating discussions. Others, like the United Nations Environment Management Group (EMG), sought guidance from the Parties. The EMG presented its draft [Global Drylands Report](#), a UN system-wide response and agenda for action on drylands for feedback.

Other side events complemented the CST and CRIC sessions. For instance, the UNCCD secretariat's Knowledge Management Science and Technology Unit show-cased key stakeholders' initiatives to support the scientific brokerage functions of the CST. Another side event focused in more detail on how the PRAIS project facilitates the work of Parties.

Stakeholders value the opportunities that the side events provide. "There is an overwhelming demand from Parties and observer organisations to present their work," according to UNCCD programme officer Emmanuel Chinyamakobvu.

Overall, many issues require further work. The good news is that significant progress is being made. Is the UNCCD establishing the right mechanisms to deal with the effects of DLDD in a comprehensive and effective way? Only time will tell, but all the signs point in the right direction.

INTERVIEW

Science and technology: breaking new ground

Professor Klaus Kellner is the current Chair of the UNCCD Committee on Science and Technology (CST) Bureau and also represents the African region on the Bureau. He is a senior scientist at South Africa's North-West University, specialising in natural resource management and conservation, restoration, land degradation and desertification. At the CST S-2 meeting in Bonn, he spoke with UNCCD News editor Susanne Reiff.



A special session

The UNCCD is moving in the right direction – this was my personal conclusion after the CST meeting (CST S-2) in Bonn in February. Besides the many fruitful discussions about scientific research on desertification, land degradation and drought, it was the spirit of optimism among so many delegates that showed the real progress made in recent years.

Parties received an update on how decisions taken at COP9 in Buenos Aires in 2009 have been implemented so far and how the Convention plans to move the scientific inputs and challenges in each country forward. But the feedback was two-way. Delegates advised the expert groups and consultants, voiced their viewpoints in the plenary and gave the Convention (secretariat) direction from a stakeholder perspective. Both the parties and the UNCCD governance bodies agreed that all in all, we are on track and making good progress towards our goals.

The process needs more participation

However, I strongly believe that even more participation from the countries is needed to fulfil the UNCCD's mission, especially with regard to the scientific and technological process. In this respect, the regional meetings at the last CST session were extremely encouraging. It seems that delegates are very excited about the UNCCD agenda and countries want to become more involved in the different activities that are planned, such as the pilot testing of the subset of impact indicators and other scientific matters.

The secretariat gets very little feedback on questionnaires sent to the UNCCD constituencies. Too often, the Parties also don't respond to requests from country experts who have been approached by the CST or the UNCCD's Knowledge Management, Science and Technology Unit. There is a real need for rosters of experts, but they either don't exist or are outdated. So our strongest message during the conference was for countries to lay the foundations for more intensive communication with the UNCCD, for instance, by providing the updated details of their science and technology correspondents and rosters of experts. I am very confident that the Parties have got the message: if they want to participate in the UNCCD, they have to communicate with us. Otherwise, they will fall behind as the UNCCD moves forward.

Developing indicators: a milestone for impact assessment

For nearly four decades, scientific consensus about the scope of land degradation and its global impact on livelihoods has been elusive. Although countries and experts have been monitoring DLDD, we cannot collectively determine their impact because there is no consensus on how to approach these assessments. In 2008, the CST began to develop this kind of framework – one which every country can apply and whose results can provide a basis for comparison of land degradation and desertification across time and countries.

So from my perspective as the Chair of the CST Bureau, the development of indicators is a major milestone for the UNCCD. For the first time, countries saw real progress on the monitoring and application of impact indicators as discussed at the CST S-2 meeting in Bonn.

In the coming months, at least one country per region will be selected to test the application of the two impact indicators that have already been approved at COP9 in 2009. These are a) land cover status and b) the proportion of the population living above the poverty line. In Africa alone, 16 countries are willing to participate in this 'testing phase', some even contributing their own resources and funding. This shows how positive countries are about moving this forward and participating. We will have difficulty in selecting only one or two countries per region. But shall we choose a country with a lot of data available – one which is already participating in large scientific projects and is well equipped with remote sensing devices, good infrastructure and stakeholder participation, for example, or shall we focus on a country that does not have such a good infrastructure and is more dependent on external support?

We have learned our lesson: we no longer claim that an indicator cannot be measured. Instead, we should find out how indicators are interlinked with each other. I am convinced that as the process continues, more and more scientists will join the debate and find new correlations between indicators, which will open the door for measuring them. Another interesting question is why the second indicator addresses the proportion of people living 'above' and not 'below' the poverty line. We believe it is important to convey a more positive message. We don't want to focus on how many people are dying; we want to see how many people are living.

“We should find out how indicators are interlinked with each other.”

The quality of data is an ongoing challenge for measuring indicators. Some countries can build on an existing comprehensive data base, while others have very little data available. We cannot expect countries to measure all 11 impact indicators at once. They could start with two or three indicators first and expand as more data become available and there is more participation. The challenge is to get started so that we can compare DLDD impacts across countries and regions.

Capacity building

To make countries capable of measuring impact indicators for DLDD, we have to invest a great deal of effort in capacity building. The challenge is not only to include countries that already have good data and participate in major international projects, but also to concentrate on countries where stakeholders are willing to measure impact indicators but perhaps do not have the knowledge, infrastructure or resources to do so. The UNCCD would like to reach out to these countries and bring them on board. We want all UNCCD Parties to participate. I am not so keen on the word 'family', but in this sense it may work, as the UNCCD wants to create a 'family' around DLDD aspects in order to work together and learn from each other.

Many institutions are used to charging a fee for their data and experience, but I am calling on scientists to share their knowledge and findings through papers in scientific journals, books, the internet or through workshops with stakeholders at grassroots level, as well as the UNCCD secretariat. We have to create and participate in networks relating to UNCCD work – on a national, regional and global scale.



Making global knowledge available

The UNCCD is currently developing a tool that enables and encourages more knowledge-sharing. We want our knowledge management system to become a key component of awareness-building efforts. Let's look at existing systems. We must not duplicate. Instead, we should pull all the strands together. There are so many networks out there on the internet, in the countries in every region, among organisations and so on. If we make use of the experience and knowledge that are out there, I can see networking on DLDD issues booming in future.

Scientists do not have to sit in their offices and see their role primarily in preparing scientific publications. It is vital to share your findings with other stakeholders and contribute to networks of all kinds. As researchers, it is our responsibility to promote and demonstrate good science and share it with others, especially the people affected by land degradation, desertification and drought. We would therefore like to invest major efforts in building up a sound UNCCD knowledge management system.

Pressing issues

I believe that food security is one of the most pressing issues we are currently facing and that it needs urgent attention, especially from a scientific and technological perspective in the UNCCD. Research on soil fertility, erosion and adaptation to drought is needed if we want to protect people's livelihoods, which will be increasingly at risk. Today, 60 infants in every 1,000 in the drylands die due to food shortage. This is terrible! With the expected population growth, the situation will become even worse. The UNCCD's CST urgently needs to address these issues.

A broader understanding of science



It is a common mistake to think of science only in terms of scientific publications and academic research. I work a lot with rural poor people in southern Africa and learn a lot from them. The local land users and managers have their own knowledge systems and I believe that they are all “scientists” in their own particular way. Through their traditional and local knowledge systems they know how to adapt to periods of drought, which plants are poisonous for their livestock, where to find water in arid systems, etc.

The challenge lies in bridging the gap between local and scientific knowledge and ensuring that the local land users’ knowledge is properly recognised and shared with others. Farmers have measured aridity for many years – scientists often still struggle to find methods to do so.

Policy-makers depend on good science. For example, if a government wants to know how many people are affected by land degradation or drought in their country, they have to rely on good scientific data and results. Policy-makers are often accused of making the wrong decisions, but in many cases they simply lack sound scientific information.

Conclusions

I am very excited about the current developments within the Committee on Science and Technology and hope that we can build on the wave we are currently riding. I see a positive future for the UNCCD, if we improve the participation of all the member countries. We need good science to act as a firm basis for effective policies and responses to DLDD. The CST is therefore committed to promoting science and technology in all regions, among all stakeholders, and at all levels – from grassroots up to policy-makers in governments.

We are currently in a very challenging phase, as the Convention is addressing vital issues as discussed at the CST S-2 in Bonn. If we can get the buy-in and increase the participation of more stakeholders, especially scientists, I am confident that the UNCCD will succeed and continue to move in a positive direction.

SPECIAL REPORT

Long-awaited precipitation and irrigation ease drought in China

The World Meteorological Organization has recently supported forecasts that climate change will lead to more extensive, frequent and intense droughts. This year’s most serious droughts hit for instance the northern regions of China and Kenya. They provide a foretaste of what to probably expect in future. UNCCD News looks at how China has dealt with the lack of rain.



“The challenge lies in bridging the gap between local and scientific knowledge.”

For months, thousands of Chinese farmers waited for rain. The soil turned drier and drier, putting the winter wheat crop in China's "breadbasket" at risk. Then in late February 2011, rain and snow provided some relief for the millions of hectares of affected farmland. Since then, the chances that farmers will reap a good harvest in June have improved.

The drought has severely impacted China's northern provinces that produce two-thirds of the country's wheat. But it is not only the crop that has suffered from the lack of rain. According to official estimates, the shortage of drinking water affected some 2.6 million people and 2.8 million livestock.

Anti-drought measures

Faced with the far-reaching threat of drought, China did not want to trust only in its good fortune. Instead, it implemented comprehensive anti-drought measures. "With concerted efforts, the impact of drought can be allayed or even eliminated," said Chen Xiwen, director of the office for the Communist Party of China Central Committee's Leading Group on Rural Work. By mid-February, the Chinese government had dispatched some 77,000 people to fight drought in its major winter wheat-growing regions. As one of the measures, they dug some 11,000 wells, carrying 360,000 cubic metres of water, according to the Chinese Meteorological Association.

Cloud-seeding

In the province of Shandong, the meteorological authorities launched their largest cloud-seeding operation in 20 years by firing 5,800 silver-iodide rockets and flares into the atmosphere to increase rainfall. The China Meteorological Administration says that its weather modifications in northern China in February increased average precipitation by 16 to 17 percent. However, scientists elsewhere question the positive effects of dispersing chemicals, as the journal *Atmospheric Research* reports.

Irrigation

According to the [Chinese Ministry of Water Resources](#), the eight drought-affected regions have irrigated 13 million hectares – almost 70 percent of the total acreage – of winter wheat with more than four billion cubic metres of water since last fall.

In the city of Handan in Hebei Province, farmers received training in practical measures to maintain soil humidity. With special tools, they loosened the soil to prevent it from hardening. This method ensures that no crops die due to fast water evaporation in the soil, reports Chinese TV station CNTV.

Economic effects

In its special alert, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) pointed to higher wheat prices and said that in January 2011, the average retail price of wheat flour had risen by more than eight percent in China compared to two months earlier. As China is the world's largest grower and consumer of wheat, a shortfall in China's crop also puts pressure on global wheat prices, reports Damian Grammaticas from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).



Although the drought in China has had a global impact, those it hit hardest are the people living in China's northern provinces. With their livelihoods at risk, all they can do is hope for rain – and that the government's anti-drought measures will have an effect.

South-to-North Water Diversion Project to mitigate China's water scarcity

China is increasingly suffering from both water scarcity and uneven water distribution. The south is fed by the Yangtze River, while the north is facing problems such as depleting surface water, shallow groundwater and even a decrease in water levels in deep groundwater aquifers. China's booming industry has an unquenchable thirst for water and its ever-growing megacities are driving up the demand for water, according to a study published by Columbia University.

In response, the Chinese government is building the South-to-North Water Diversion Project to channel water from the Yangtze and Yellow rivers to three rivers in the arid north. However, there are many critical aspects of this mega-project, such as the relocation of 330,000 people.

Nevertheless, the Chinese State Council assigned an important role to south-to-north water diversion in its efforts to combat this winter's drought. According to Chinese news agency Xinhua, the province of Shandong, which was severely affected by the drought, irrigated over 41,000 hectares of its wheat crop using water from the project.

The situation remains serious, however. There are concerns that water scarcity will greatly constrain China's economic growth. In the northern plain, which is home to 200 million people and includes the cities of Beijing and Tianjing, water will remain a scarce and precious natural resource.



PRACTICE

Yak and karakul reach the fashion runways

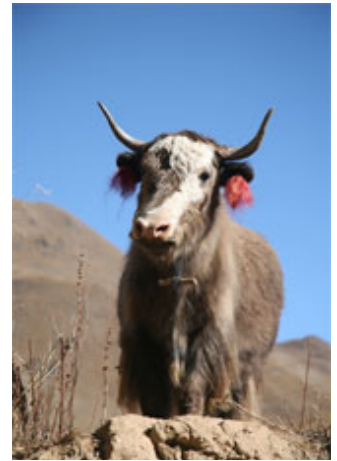
The world's drylands, with their harsh living conditions, barely register on the style-o-meter of the average US, European or Chinese fashionista. In the highlands of Tibet, for instance, aridity makes it difficult for people to earn a decent livelihood. Many people here raise yak, a large domesticated ox that can graze at an altitude of 3,500 to 5,000 m. Yaks supply milk and butter, their hair is used for ropes, their skin for leather and their dung for fuel. But most importantly, this shaggy beast is a reliable pack animal – not a priority for most followers of fashion.



Now the yak has caught the interest of high-end consumers worldwide. Its exquisite wool easily rivals cashmere or merino, which have already cornered a healthy share of the world's luxury textile markets. The huge Chinese market is crucial here, but the yak is now entering new territory. It has already featured in French fashion magazine Marie Claire and more than 100 stores in ten countries now stock the Shokay Collection of products made from luxury yak down, launched by two young entrepreneurs based in Shanghai.

Shokay's founders Carol Chyau and Marie So are fulsome in their praise for yak fibre, which provides maximum warmth, comfort, and style. When explaining their business idea, they also emphasise the social impact. "We aim to source our yak fibre directly from Tibetan herders, enabling them to earn a long-term sustainable living while preserving their traditional lifestyle. We believe that by investing and reinvesting our success into the local communities, we ensure the opportunity of choice for future Tibetan generations." The world seems to like their idea, which has garnered a number of international awards. In 2009, Marie So made it to the 100 Young Global Leaders list at the World Economic Forum and Carol Chyau was the Asian finalist in the Cartier Women's Initiative Awards.

Tibetan herders will be happy with the new business opportunities. Desertified land, which currently covers around 20 million hectares and accounts for 18 percent of Tibet's territory, is expanding at a rate of 39,600 hectares annually, according to Sangye Drawa, Party Chief of Tibet's Regional Forestry Bureau, quoted by Chinese news agency Xinhua. But the yak is not the only dryland animal to reach the fashion runways. Swakara, a registered brand name of karakul fur from the Namibian drylands, is exclusively marketed through Copenhagen Fur in Denmark, which sells around 140,000 Namibian pelts per year.



New business opportunities for Tibetan herders

The swakara industry aims to provide essential income for communities in the arid regions of Namibia where conventional farming is impossible. "Production is in harmony with these fragile ecosystems and swakara therefore represents a sustainable resource," says the Karakul Board of Namibia. Copenhagen Fur adds: "The sheep help increase and maintain the vegetation in the barren desert which covers 80 percent of the country. As they stomp on the grass while grazing for food, they actually plant the grass seeds further into the ground, grass seeds which the wind would otherwise carry away."

The karakul sheep originates from Central Asia. It was introduced to Namibia by German colonists in the early 20th century. Karakul can thrive under the extremely harsh conditions of the Namibian drylands.

Jessica Smith, Senior Programme Officer for Land and Livelihoods at the [UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre](#), believes that such enterprising approaches are important in drylands as a way of combating biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services. "The commercialisation of biodiversity-based products is recognised as a mechanism for providing incentives for the sustainable management of biodiversity while greening the economy, creating employment opportunities and supporting sustainable livelihoods."



BROWSING

Publications

UNEP Year Book 2011

The UNEP Year Book 2011 – the 8th edition of the UN Environment Programme flagship report – examines emerging global issues and provides an overview of the latest environmental science. It also highlights major environmental events and developments over the past year and presents the most recent data and indicators.

► http://www.unep.org/yearbook/2011/pdfs/UNEP_YEARBOOK_Fullreport.pdf

Climate change will bring drought, not rain, to East Africa

A study contradicting IPCC predictions of higher rainfall in East Africa has attracted criticism from African climate researchers

► <http://www.scidev.net/en/news/climate-change-will-bring-drought-not-rain-to-east-africa-.html>

The original article from Springer is available at

► <http://www.springerlink.com/content/u0352236x6n868n2/fulltext.html>

The Bue Peace warns about desertification in the Middle East

The Middle East is likely to plunge into a serious humanitarian crisis due to depletion of water resources, unless remedial measures are introduced urgently, according to a new report, The Bue Peace, prepared by the Strategic Foresight Group. Desertification is

expected to affect Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan. Around 60 percent of the land in Syria faces the threat of desertification. In the Koyuna basin in Turkey, about 80 percent of the depletion has occurred over the last decade, and the basin faces complete desertification by 2030.

› http://www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_198458.pdf

Grenada: SLM against land degradation

Land degradation is increasing in many parts of the tri-island state of Grenada, threatening the livelihoods of vulnerable communities and hindering efforts to promote sustainable growth and development. The Government of Grenada is presently implementing the Capacity Building and Mainstreaming of SLM project, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Grenada. Its goal is to protect agricultural, forest and other terrestrial land uses in Grenada.

› http://slmgrenada.org/land_degrad/

Video

PRAIS on video

A new video outlines the PRAIS initiative. PRAIS is the interactive online portal to collect and collate reports on progress in the implementation of the UNCCD's 10-year strategy, based on quantifiable actions. <http://www.vimeo.com/20251351/>

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 has 194 Parties (193 countries plus the European Union) and is one of the three so-called "Rio Conventions", along with the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). The UNCCD 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

Tel (switchboard): + 49 228 815 2800 Fax: + 49 228 815 2898 secretariat@unccd.int

www.unccd.int

Contact UNCCD News at newsbox@unccd.int

UNCCD News

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