

UNCCD News

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

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A solar bread oven designed in Burkina Faso provides an alternative to using wood fires for cooking and supports the country's efforts to build a green economy. [▶ page 9](#)

FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Revisiting Rio: Towards sustainable land use for all and by all

The "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 was a landmark in the global efforts to preserve our planet's health. Twenty years later, in June 2012, the world will gather in Rio again for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). By promoting a systemic shift towards a green economy, it is committed to setting another milestone on the way to sustainable development.

In the twenty years between the two Summits in 1992 and 2012, major changes have occurred, both positive and negative: The topics of the three Rio Conventions – desertification/land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss – have become an integral part of the international political agenda. Countless initiatives have been launched and people all over the globe have become conscious of global sustainability needs.

Yet the magnitude of the Earth's environmental challenges is still increasing. The imperative to ensure sustainable use of land remains unclear to many people. The percentage of Earth's land area stricken by serious drought has more than doubled from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Land degradation directly affects 1.5 billion people globally and 75 billion tonnes of fertile soil, which is the most significant non-renewable geo-resource, disappear every year.

These facts make it very clear that we must act now. A key option for promoting a sustainable future is a strategy to replace our outdated economic behaviour and understanding of what constitutes economic success. 52 per cent of the land used for agriculture today is moderately or severely affected by land degradation. However, sustainable land practices are a key element of the long-term sustainability of our society. We have to make use of this opportunity, which implies a major paradigm shift in modern agriculture. We should not waste any more time, as the environmental, social and economic costs of our unsustainable land use practices are becoming more obvious every day.

In pursuing our goals, a concerted effort is vital. Policy-makers, the business community and civil society will have to pull together. I am particularly pleased that Jeremy Oppenheim from McKinsey & Company shares his views on a green economy from an economic perspective in the interview in this issue of UNCCD News. But a concerted effort also implies pursuing a broader approach encompassing various topics which are interdependent. Our special report on "Water,



Sustainable land practices are a key element of the long-term sustainability of our society.

