

Highlights Report
Land for Life Day
12 September 2017
Ordos, China

Ms. Jenny Choo, Land for Life Programme Coordinator at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat introduced 'Land for Life Day' at the Rio Conventions Pavilion in Ordos, China. Ms. Choo explained that Land for Life Day is meant to showcase sustainable land management as an approach to tackle global issues. An opening remark was delivered by UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary, Mr. Pradeep Monga. He said, "We realize that desertification is not only a global issue but a local issue. If we don't all invest in ending desertification and bringing the private sector on board, many people will try to migrate to find a better life. We can't do business-as-usual; it has to be business unusual." He went on to say, "Land degradation is not a global issue, but also the global challenge," and "If you want to know your future, look at your present actions." Mr. Monga stressed that the 2017 Land for Life Award Winners are setting great examples for taking action against desertification, and that in order to truly combat desertification, "we need champions".



UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary, Mr. Pradeep Monga delivers an opening remark for Land for Life Day

The next event allowed the audience to hear from the UNCCD 2017 Land for Life Award Winners. Dr. Marcella D'Souza, Executive Director of Watershed Organisation Trust

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(WOTR) presented its work on sustainable land management in India. D’Souza explained, “Desertification in India has been caused by the overuse of land and deforestation and climate change”. She emphasized, “There is no solution to drought without participatory watershed development”. A main focus of her talk was the importance of “engaging the local community to work together and sweat together to change the land”. She also highlighted that WOTR has a strong focus on women’s empowerment and ensures women are actively engaged in the village development communities. Furthermore, the organization also focuses on ecosystem development and natural resource management, as well as biodiversity promotion. Most importantly, Dr. D’Souza discussed the importance of water management, warning “If we don’t focus on water stewardship, we will lose no matter what else we do” and “if we don’t get the tools and methodologies for contextual upscaling, we will be losers”.

Ms. Magda Nassef, from UN Environment presented her winning project Practical Action Sudan. She began by saying the conflict in Darfur began in 2003 and that the task of implementing the project is therefore coordinated and complex. She stressed the project’s focus of involving the government in the work they are doing with local communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Ms. Nassef said “We need to improve cooperation with trust”, and in order to “make sure that state ministers are on our side”, the project “makes sure that ministers visit the communities and hear people’s voices”.

In a presentation on how online communication can have an impact on land, Ms. Beth Johnson, designer of the UNCCD’s new logo, discussed the importance of branding and messaging in effectively communicating messages to stakeholders and getting people to take action. She opened her talk by saying, “All solutions begin with awareness,” emphasizing the role creative communication can have on climate change and land issues. Public support is crucial to get policymakers in motion, external demand and awareness can only increase systemic momentum. Johnson advocates the value of storytelling over statistical reports, explaining that vivid stories using images and words that depict the reality that is awaiting us, is the only way to captivate the attention and compassion of large audiences. The workshop then demonstrated the fundamental communication tool box through inspirational case studies of work produced by the UNCCD secretariat and contextual organizations. The first tool is branding and messaging: every organization must have a clear mission statement, and every communication asset must match up thereafter. The second tool is online communication and campaigns, the space where creativity can shine and audiences can engage further, as “seeing is believing.” A notable case study Johnson shared was the UNCCD’s Great Green Wall initiative of planting greenery across northern Africa from West to East to create a barrier to stop the spreading of desertification to the north and south. The project has been a huge success, which

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Johnson suggested was due to its effective online campaign because of its extraordinary content reach. The UNCCD created a moving video about the Great Green Wall initiative’s campaign, as well as a virtual reality experience of the project on the ground. “Video is the fastest and most emotive way to tell our stories” and the virtual reality experience enables people to be transported to the GGW before their very eyes. She went on to speak about the power of reaching people through social media via interactive campaigns and hashtags. Johnson also highlighted the success United Nations organizations have had with celebrity partnerships, such as the partnership between UN Women and Emma Watson, whose speech for the HeforShe campaign reached more than 2 million viewers. She summed up the talk by saying effective campaigns require a clear mission statement, a symbol to rally behind, storytelling, emotive imagery and social interaction.



Ms. Beth Johnson discusses the importance of branding and messaging in effectively communicating messages to stakeholders

During the midday session, sustainable land management success stories were screened during a sit-down lunch. Thereafter, Ms. Bai Xue gave a talk on scaling restoration with digital technology as she discussed an app created by Ant Financial, subsidiary group of Alibaba. She said, “An ant is very small, but accumulated small efforts lead to big changes.”

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One third of people in Beijing and Shanghai use the Ant App with 80%-90% coming from the younger generation. Continuing, Xue explained that the app “has 230 million registered users, has cut 1.22 million tons of carbon emissions and has planted 10.25 million trees”. Summing up her presentation, she concluded “from virtual trees to real trees, we are changing deserts from thousands of miles away”.

In the late afternoon, there was an open discussion centered on the question: Is ensuring societal sustainability, stability and security everyone’s responsibility? Ms. Yukie Hori, UNCCD Spokesperson and Communication Team Leader, moderated the event. Panelists included, Ms. Magda Nassef from UNEP, Dr. Mantang Cai, Chief Scientist at ELION Resource Group, Dr. Marcella D’Souza from WOTR, Mr. John Kwon of Future Forest, and Mr. Oliver Gadner of Regeneration International. Ms. Hori opened the discussion by saying, “One hundred and thirty-five million people have left their homes due to desertification alone. We are trying to meet this global challenge so people can stay wherever they want.”

Dr. D’Souza added that “As long as land degradation is attended to, I think people would want to stay in their home.” Mr. Kwon is working with young people to combat desertification and said “it’s about motivating urban citizens to care about land degradation. Workers in the degraded fields get minimum wage. If we can get young people to see land degradation as their own problem commercializing and packaging the land, we could have different outcomes”.

The panel then discussed the question: If the land of refugees is healthy, will the asylum seeker stay in their own country? Mr. Gadner said, “There are demands and models of training refugees to plant crops in the deserts. The models are scalable and need to be scaled”. Ms. Nassef explained her experience with the project in Darfur, saying that “people have the initiative to work on their land, so even when villages are destroyed, they are still interested in staying and working the land”. An additional question discussed concerned the extent to which desert ecosystems can be altered without negatively impacting biodiversity. Dr. Cai discussed an example from ELION’s model of tree planting in the Kubuqi desert saying, “we have methodologies at hand to calculate how many trees we need so as to not hurt the ecosystem”. Later in the discussion, Dr. D’Souza asked “how do we make rural life more appealing to young people so that they choose to stay? How do we provide non-land based activities for rural youths? How do we add value to the farming activities so that it becomes a profession of honor?” Kwon suggested, “When young people plant trees in the desert, they’ve established a special bond with the land, but when they get back to the city, that bond is lost. We need to motivate more young people to join this effort, to let them make money out of it”.

Ms. Boping Chen of the World Future Council (WFC) moderated the final session of Land for Life Day titled “Policies & Land: Can good policies facilitate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15.3 concerning the land degradation neutrality (LDN) goal?” The Future Policy Award and winners were introduced by Alexandra Wandel of WFC. She said the winners inspire other policy makers to make policies for future generations.

The Gold Winner of the Future Policy Award, was the Tigray region of Ethiopia, with its interpretation of Ethiopia’s development strategy, which focused on food self-sufficiency and economic growth by conserving land and promoting sustainable agriculture. Dr. Atinkut Mezgeb, Head of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Tigray region, Ethiopia accepted the award for his region and said, “the policy is to bring in development strategies without polluting the environment”.

Ms. Valquiria Alves Smith Lima, Vice President of AP1MC (Associação Programa Um Milhão de Cisternas para o Semiárido) and Executive Coordinator of ASA (Articulação no Semiárido) Brazil for the Brazilian State of Minas Gerais accepted the Silver Future Policy Award for 2017. The winning policy was a participative, bottom-up programme that provides water in Brazil’s drought-prone semi-arid region using simple rainwater collection technology. She said, “we have a dialogue with our government to combat desertification” and “civil society organizations have a dialogue with the government about water and resources to fight desertification”.

Ms. Boping Chen, China Director, World Future Council, China accepted the Future Policy Bronze Award on behalf of China. The winning policy was the world’s first integrated law dedicated to combating desertification. Chen said, “Good policies mean the involvement of people and civil society in policy. Good policies are policies for the people and from the people”.

Accepting the Future Policy Vision Award for an international policy was Mr. Paul Luu., Executive Secretary of the 4 per 1000 Initiative in France. The policy is an awareness raising, high-level political initiative that communicates a new concept for mitigating climate change through the annual increase in soil organic carbon by 0.4 per cent in the top 30-40 cm of agricultural soils. He said “Storing carbon in soils is important because it can mitigate climate change, adapt to climate change and contribute to food security and restore land degradation”. His suggestion was that the international community should “increase carbon sequestration in soils first”. Bronze awards were also awarded to policies in Australia, Jordan and Niger.



Patrick Augenstein, writer and producer, answers questions after the screening of two of his short films on land degradation

In the evening, a screening of two short films written and produced by Patrick Augenstein was held. The director said shooting the film was “a haunting experience” and that he saw many people who struggle with the consequences of land degradation, but that filming also makes him excited to bring together the voices of farmers, policy makers and local people. Land for Life Day ended with a pleasant networking and chilling out session with winners and panelists during an evening reception.

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Pictures from Land for Life Day





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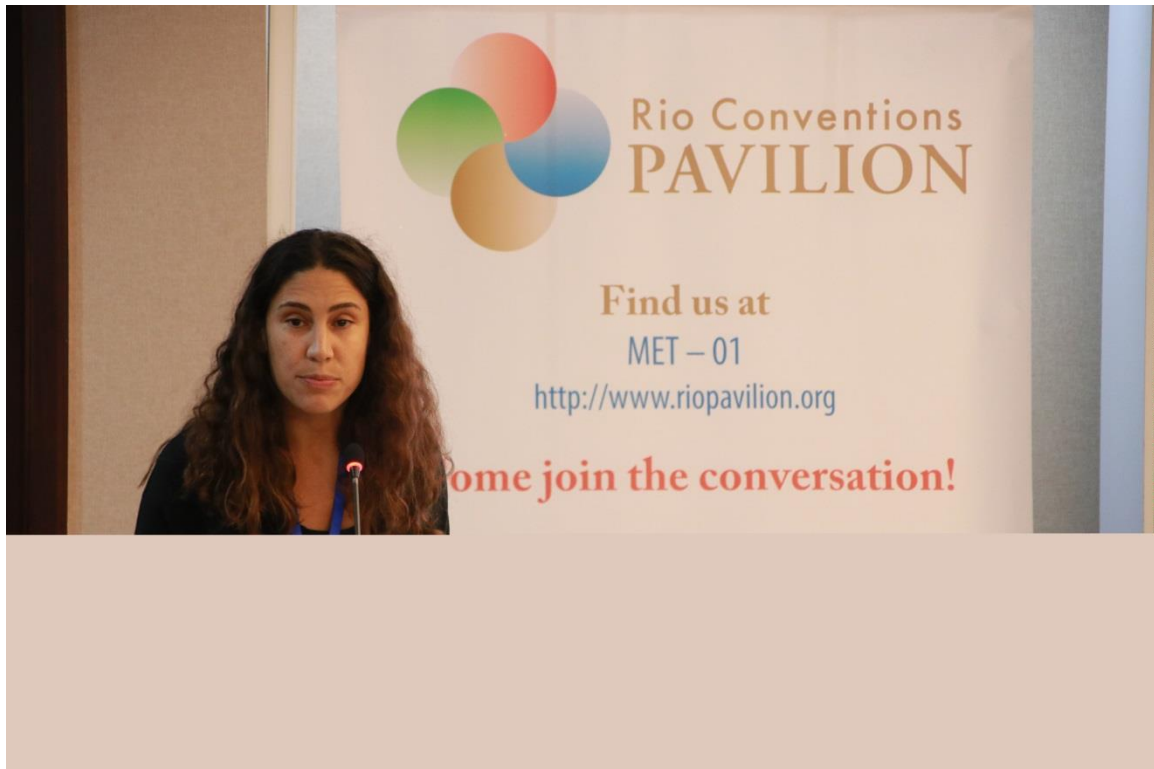




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