



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
DR. CRISTIANA PAŞCA PALMER  
on the occasion of  
The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought  
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*Land has true value – invest in it*

Land is nature's gift. Not only that it makes our planet habitable, but it offers a multitude of resources for our benefit.

Yet, this gift is not an infinite, but a scarce resource.

For centuries, we have misused this treasure through land grabbing, unplanned urban and industrial sprawl, and unsustainable agricultural practices. The result is that a third of our planet's land is severely degraded. And the trends are worrying. Consumption of Earth's natural resources has doubled in the last 30 years. Unsustainable land management has led to crises, vulnerabilities and risks, with land's ability to support life on Earth being currently in decline. Moreover, land in crisis impacts induces human crises and potential displacements, including the erosion of invaluable traditional knowledge, through its spiritual and cultural connection to the land.

Making the distinction between land use and land abuse becomes, thus, imperative.

It is time to change course.

It would be difficult to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without addressing land degradation. For example, addressing land degradation is fundamental to alleviating poverty (SDG 1). Soil organic matter stores rain water and increases the resilience of agricultural systems to shocks, while fertile land is vital for food security (SDG 2). Sequestering carbon in soils represents an effective solution to climate change (SDG 13). Enhancing carbon stocks through agricultural soils could create value on the carbon market from US\$ 96 to 480 billion annually (SDG 8). And sustainable land management (SLM) is also central to preserving biodiversity (SDG 15).

Taking action against soil erosion over 105 million hectares could also save up to US\$ 62.4 billion in net present value over the next 15 years.

By investing in sustainable land management, we could protect our lands, conserve and sustainability use biodiversity, and enhance livelihoods. By investing in smart agriculture, farmers could gain higher yields while reducing the need for inputs like pesticides. By supporting a biodiversity-friendly economy through investing in technologies and innovation, policy makers and land managers could accelerate the development of healthy and resilient livelihoods and poverty eradication. And by restoring soils' organic

matter and thus strengthening CO2 sequestration capacity, countries could make contributions to address global targets on climate change, land management and biodiversity conservation. Yet, only eight National Determined Contributions (NDCs) to Paris climate change Agreement mention soil.

We need, then, to raise awareness.

We need to invest in national data on land management and use it to inform policy-making.

We need to mobilize all relevant actors, from governments to civil society, the scientific community and the private sector.

And we need to develop the value proposition for each and every user of the land, as users are at the heart of any conservation, sustainable use and restoration action.

By sustainably managing our land we can regenerate economies, create jobs, and revitalize communities.

On this World Day to Combat Desertification and Draught, I invite you to support a biodiversity-friendly economy, invest in sustainable land management SLM, and double our efforts to achieve SDG target 15.3 on land degradation neutrality.

Let us invest in biodiversity and in land. The dividends will be generous.

The future is in our hands.

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