

WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION & LAND DEGRADATION

JUNE 17, 2015



“No such thing as a free lunch. Invest in healthy Soils.”

Some 805 million people in the world lacked sufficient nutritious food between 2012 and 2014 according to the 2014 State of Food Insecurity report. That is about one in every eight people. The vast majority lived in developing countries. Although significant progress has been made towards the MDG hunger target, progress across regions and countries is still uneven.

Tackling hunger requires a multi-faceted approach – from economic development, nutritional intake to managing natural disasters. Still, a focus on land is critical. More than 99.7% of our food calories comes from the land. With the competition for productive land growing even as the global population rises, land for food production will get scarcer. We need to recover degraded land to remain food secure.

Hunger is most prevalent in the developing country dryland areas where water retention is poor, and the land is highly vulnerable to natural and human destructions.

World Day to Combat Desertification & Land Degradation 2015 calls for:

- (1) Sustainable land management in the drylands, especially through smart agriculture and adaptation to changing climate;
- (2) Access to technology and land rights for small holder farmers who safeguard the environment and meet the food needs of the poor;
- (3) Recognizing and learning from the best practices on the balanced use of land for ecology and consumption;
- (4) Promoting increased investments in sustainable land management practices to ensure the establishment and maintenance of sustainable food systems;
- (5) Recognizing desertification/land degradation as the invisible frontline with potential threats to security, peace and stability of affected countries through, for example, food and water scarcity and environmentally forced migration.



“Attainment of food security for all through sustainable food systems.”

Message from His Excellency Lyonpo Yeshey Dorji, Hon’ble Minister for Agriculture and Forests



(SLM) measures respectively.

Farming Systems in Bhutan engage more than 65 % of the population and is changing rapidly from the traditional mixed farming to semi-commercial or specialized farming systems including livestock and timber production. The farmers have started cultivating more tubers, vegetable and fruit crops on areas where they grew traditional cereal crops. These crops require much higher quantities of plant nutrients and good land husbandry practices to sustain production. Most of the operated land, accounting for 3% of the total geographical area, is on gentle to steep sloping land. The soil formations are very young resulting in shallow soil depth that is highly susceptible to the forces of erosions and land-slides. We must continue to scale up the best sustainable land management practices to improve land productivity thereby increasing food production to feed our growing population.

The first national land management campaign was initiated in the Eastern Bhutan in 2005 with the twin objectives of reducing land degradation and restoring degraded land. The farmers, local leaders and officials of the Central Agencies participated in the campaign. The causes of land degradation was studied, awareness created, the participants were educated and best practices of SLM implemented in all the campaign sites. There was nation-wide multi-media publicity. Many local governments

also mainstreamed SLM measures into their local annual plans. I am glad to note that within a decade since the first national campaign, a community based group called Thongrong Sazhing Tshogpa (TST) from Phongmey, Trashigang, with the continued technical support of National Soil Services Center under Department of Agriculture, is leading the celebration of World Day to Combat Land Degradation, June 17, with financial support from GEF Small Grants Programme/ Community Development & Knowledge Management (COMDEKS) of Satoyama Initiative, UNDP and technical support from the National Soil Services Centre, Thimphu. I congratulate TST for leading this initiative from the grassroots.

Today, on June 17, let me call on all our landowners, local leaders, policy makers and politicians to commit to restore degraded land, and invest more in healthy soils. Healthy soil can ensure food, nutrition and water security of our nation.

The World Day to Combat Desertification/ Land Degradation is observed every year on June 17. The theme this year is “Invest in healthy soils, with focus on attainment of food security for all through sustainable food systems”. The land degradation refers to any reduction or loss in the biological or economic productive capacity of the land resource base. Globally it is estimated that more than 50 % of all agricultural land is degraded, and 25% of the world’s land area is either highly degraded or undergoing high rates of degradation according to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). One of the main factors for loss of land productivity is the loss of fertile topsoil through erosion induced by farming activities. Estimates of average annual soil loss through soil erosion on cropland in Africa, South America and Asia is around 30 to 40t/ha. In Bhutan, one study estimates soil loss of approximately 3.34 t/ha and 24.61t/ha with and without sustainable land management



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