

FORUM: United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)

TOPIC: Combating Desertification and Land Degradation and the Effects on Agriculture

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POSITION: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Katerina Vardoulaki, and I will be one of the presidents of the UNEP committee at this year's AML MUN conference. I am 17 years old, in 12th grade in Model Lyceum of Anavryta and I am really excited for the opportunity to work with all of you. I have been engaged in MUN since the 7th grade and it's such an honor to be involved in your MUN journeys and to be able to help you love MUN as much as I do.

I am aware that some of you might be beginners, but I hope we will have fruitful debates, and we will come up with effective resolutions to help combat the problem. It is perfectly normal to be nervous to speak in front of an audience, but I would like to urge all of you to participate as much as you can. That way, we will all have fun and make the most of this experience.

I look forward to working with you and hearing all your amazing ideas. I hope our collaboration runs smoothly and most importantly we all have fun. If you need anything at all feel free to contact me at catherine.vardoulaki@hotmail.com. I look forward to meeting you all!

Kind regards,

Katerina Vardoulaki

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

In this topic, we will be discussing desertification and land degradation and the effects on agriculture, and more specifically you will be asked to come up with ways to combat it. This means that you will have to understand the topic in depth so that your solutions can be as effective as possible.

Desertification and land degradation represent one of the greatest environmental challenges of our time, threatening global food security, biodiversity and overall human survival, due to the problems they cause. In the future, the negative impact of those issues on human society is highly likely to be intensified. It is

estimated that between 50 and 700 million people could be forced to migrate by 2050 due to those issues and climate change.¹

While desertification might be misunderstood for the expansion of existing deserts, it is the systematic decline of land productivity in dryland ecosystems. Desertification occurs exclusively in drylands, which are arid, semi- arid and dry sub-humid areas covering over 40% of the Earth's land, more specifically about 41,3%.² Basically, it is the death of fertile soil which causes a lot of problems in agriculture. Land degradation, on the other hand, affects all ecosystems, from fertile agricultural fields to forests, and that is why it is measured by the percentage of land that is degraded over the total land area.

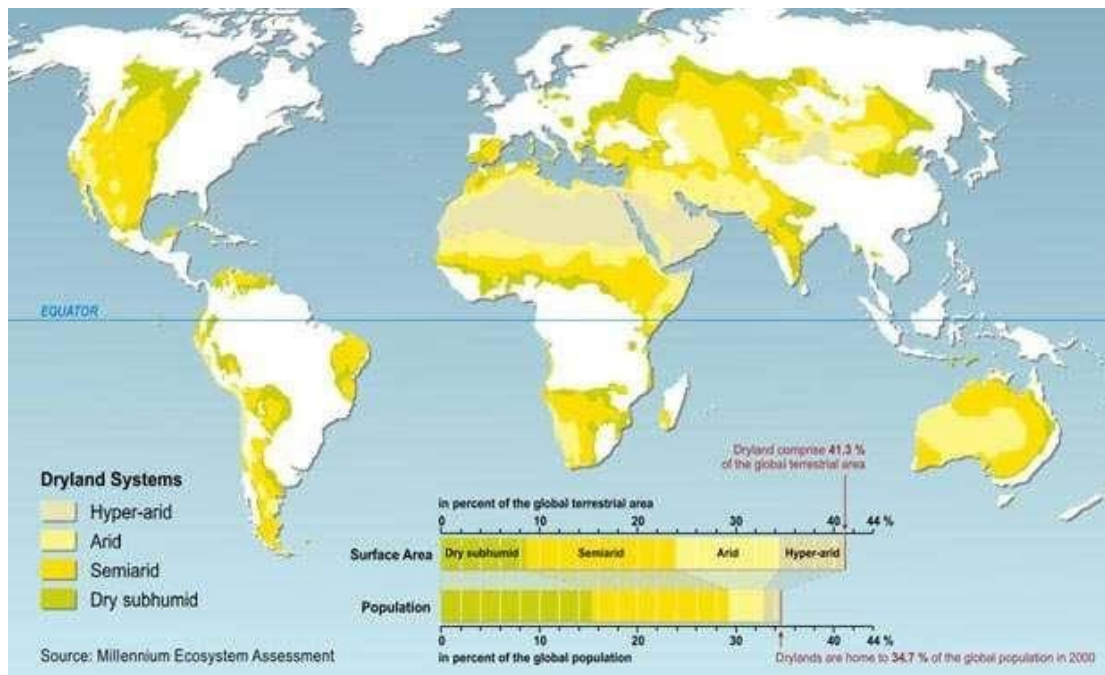
These issues are inflicted by many factors, including extreme weather conditions, especially drought, which are caused by human activities that pollute the environment and lead to climate change. Furthermore, the increasingly high pressure in agricultural and livestock production due to financial motives, as well as the urbanization and deforestation of tree-covered areas have also contributed to the expansion of these problems. As a result, the lands are more infertile, rendering them useless and the environment around the inhabitable for flora and fauna.

This issue is more serious in certain areas of the world, such as China, Africa as a whole, but more specifically the Ivory Coast, Jordan, Australia, Brazil and Peru. In these areas, desertification has affected every aspect of people's lives, including food and water availability and quality, agriculture, their economy and their society. This occurs because desertification has many negative impacts to the natural environment of the countries and continents that it affects, which leads to the downgrade in quality in food and water resources and makes agriculture hard to practice, since the ground is infertile. That results in people who financially depend on agriculture to lose their jobs, thus leading to economical and societal problems, as there is a rise in the numbers of unemployment and poverty. Due to food and water scarcity, moreover, human rights are violated and human life is devalued, thus people enter survival mode. When people are in survival mode, they tend to disregard their community, focusing only on themselves and their family, which leads to an increase in crime and violence rates. Furthermore, in such conditions, they usually overlook their education,

¹ Land Degradation | ESDAC, <https://esdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu/themes/land-degradation> , Accessed July 23, 2026

² deserts, desertification, drylands, biodiversity, climate change, the environment, United Nations, https://www.un.org/en/events/desertification_decade/whynow.shtml , Accessed July 23, 2026

fixating on quick and easy ways to make money, which results in undereducation and overall hate expressed through racism, sexism and homophobia.



Dryland systems of the earth ³

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Desertification

“The process of productive and habitable land becoming a desert”.⁴

Degradation

“The process of something being damaged or made worse”.⁵

³ Dryland systems. From: Millenium Ecosystem Assessment (2005). | Download Scientific Diagram, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Dryland-systems-From-Millenium-Ecosystem-Assessment-2005_fig1_288485820 , Accessed July 23, 2026

⁴ desertification noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/desertification) , <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/desertification> , Accessed July 23, 2026

⁵ degradation noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/degradation) , <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/degradation> ,Accessed July 23, 2026

Urbanization

“The process in which towns, streets, factories, etc. are built where there was once countryside”.⁶

Deforestation

“The act of cutting down or burning the trees in an area”.⁷

Migration

“The movement of people to a new country or area in order to find work or better living conditions”.⁸

Climate Change

“Changes in the earth’s weather, including changes in temperature, wind patterns and rainfall, especially the increase in the temperature of the earth’s atmosphere that is caused by the increase of particular gases, especially carbon dioxide”.⁹

Drylands

“Drylands are characterized by a scarcity of water, which affects both natural and managed ecosystems and constrains the production of livestock as well as crops, wood, forage and other plants and affects the delivery of environmental services”.¹⁰

Flora

“ The plants of a particular area, type of environment or period of time”.¹¹

⁶ urbanization noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/urbanization) , <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/urbanization> , Date accessed July 23 2026

⁷ deforestation noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/deforestation) , <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/deforestation> , Date accessed July 23 2026

⁸ migration noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/migration) , <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/migration> , Date accessed July 23 2026

⁹ Climate change, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/climate-change?q=climate%2Bchange%2B> , Date accessed 11 August 2026

¹⁰ FAO.org, <https://www.fao.org/dryland-forestry/background/what-are-drylands/en/> , Date accessed 11 August 2026

¹¹ flora noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/flora?q=flora) , <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/flora?q=flora> , Date accessed 11 August 2026

Agriculture

“The science or practice of farming”.¹²

Biodiversity

“The existence of a large number of different kinds of animals and plants which make a balanced environment”.¹³

Soil Erosion

“The process of soil being gradually damaged and removed by the waves, rain, or wind, or the result of this process”.¹⁴

Tilling

“To prepare and use land for growing crops”.¹⁵

Overgrazing

“The practice of allowing animals such as cows to eat the plants on an area of land for too long so that the plants disappear completely”.¹⁶

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical background

The term desertification was first used in West Africa in 1949 by a French ranger to describe the expansion of the Desert Sahara that was consuming the grassland nearby. Later on, however, it was proven that desertification was not an issue only in Africa but in all the drylands worldwide.

¹²agriculture noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/agriculture), <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/agriculture> . , Date accessed 11 August 2026

¹³biodiversity noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/biodiversity?q=biodiversity), <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/biodiversity?q=biodiversity>, Date accessed 11 August 2026

¹⁴Soil erosion, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/soil-erosion> , Date accessed 11 August 2026

¹⁵till verb - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/till_3?q=tilling), https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/till_3?q=tilling, Date accessed 11 August 2026

¹⁶overgrazing noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/overgrazing?q=overgrazing%2B), <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/overgrazing?q=overgrazing%2B> , Date accessed 11 August 2026

The first time the issue of desertification was brought up in the United Nations (UN) was in 1977, when the Sahel region suffered from a drought that resulted in the UN calling a conference in Nairobi, Kenya. In said conference, the UN recognized desertification as a worldwide issue and calculated the land that was affected by it to be about 75,1% of the total drylands, excluding deserts.¹⁷

In 1991, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) came to the conclusion that the issue had intensified, and certain measures had to be taken. In December of 1992, UNEP specified the word “desertification” as “land degradation in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas resulting mainly from adverse human impact”¹⁸ and stated that the changes that it causes had to be more permanent, in order to discern it from natural catastrophes, such as droughts. Nevertheless, in 1994, the term was expanded by the addition of the phrase “climatic fluctuations”. Thus, the official definition of the word became: “land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic fluctuations and human activities”.¹⁹

In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly declared that year as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, in order to raise awareness for the world’s deserts and the worldwide spread problem of land degradation. In 2007, it was stated that 250 million people had been directly affected by desertification and the lives of one billion people had been threatened by the same problem, so the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) launched a 10-year strategic plan and framework, which had international cooperation and sustainable development as its primary objectives.

Sahara Desert

It is not widely known that the Sahara was not always as enormous and arid as it is nowadays. As a matter of fact, about 11 to 5 thousand years ago, the desert was almost completely covered by greenery. Desertification is not new to Africa; it has been an issue for thousands of years. Nevertheless, as humans evolve, the problem

¹⁷(PDF) Desertification and land degradation: origins, processes and solution – A literature review, page 6

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288485820_Desertification_and_land_degradation_origins_processes_and_solution_-_A_literature_review, August 15, 2026

¹⁸(PDF) Desertification and land degradation: origins, processes and solution – A literature review, page 7

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288485820_Desertification_and_land_degradation_origins_processes_and_solution_-_A_literature_review, August 15, 2026

¹⁹(PDF) Desertification and land degradation: origins, processes and solution – A literature review, page 6

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288485820_Desertification_and_land_degradation_origins_processes_and_solution_-_A_literature_review, August 15, 2026

worsens and has faster and more detrimental results to the land's integrity. Nowadays, due to a series of non-stop catastrophic droughts, the Sahara Desert is documented to have been enlarged by 10%.²⁰

The district of Sabratha in Libya, especially in the Tellil Forest, which was flourishing with trees and plants in 2004, and the Sabratha National Park, have been subjected to a concerning plummet in vegetation by 2023. Specifically, in the span of just 30 years, between 1985 and 2015, the lands that were covered in plants have terribly decreased from 7.8% to just 0.8%.²¹

Causes of Desertification and Land Degradation

The causes for desertification and land degradation are multiple, and they vary. There are many environmental factors that weigh in, like droughts, since such lack of rain can result in all the plants in the specific area dying off, while leading to desertification that may be permanent, if not fixed. Also, temperature shifts can factor in the issue of land degradation, as the survival of animals and plants is deemed even more difficult, due to the fact that damaged plants and corrupting ecosystems produce less food, the landscapes are not favorable for their daily needs and the water is polluted. Finally, regarding the environmental factors, there exists the problem of soil erosion, which occurs when the soil is exposed to weather conditions such as the sun, wind and rain without any protection from them. Consequently, said soil and all its necessary nutrients that make the land fertile, get blown away.

Global warming aside, land degradation nowadays is caused due to human activity. Firstly, deforestation is possibly one of the most harmful causes of desertification, which started off with farmers searching for more land to utilize and became more of a problem when forests as a whole were torn down. This situation happened as a result of the escalation of urbanization and the need for bigger cities, in order to host all the people that were leaving the countryside in search for a better life. In the last 40 years, more than 65,982 square kilometers of the Amazon rainforest have been torn down and the damage of deforestation would take decades to undo even if it stopped today.²² Furthermore, unsustainable farming deeply harms the fertile land, turning it into barren territory, by relying on synthetic fertilizers which

²⁰Desertification in North Africa: A Growing Threat to the Environment, Economy and Daily Life, <https://www.greenpeace.org/mena/en/desertification-in-north-africa/> , Date accessed 17 August, 2026

²¹Desertification in North Africa: A Growing Threat to the Environment, Economy and Daily Life, subsection: Case Study: Tellil Forest in Sabratha – A Battle for Survival, <https://www.greenpeace.org/mena/en/desertification-in-north-africa/> , Date accessed 17 August, 2026

²²Crop Monitoring & Smart Systems for Real-Time Agricultural Management | Cropler, <https://www.cropler.io/blog-posts/desertification-causes-effects-and-solutions/> , August 15, 2026

pump the soil full of acids, whilst killing off the microbes that live in it and help it remain fertile. The reckless tilling and the lack of awareness regarding excessive water usage and its contamination with soil also contribute to the issue at hand. Lastly, industrial development overall has taken a toll on agricultural communities, since it depletes the land and makes fertile soils rarer. Mining and oil-drilling operations on the roads play a big part in that, as they spoil the quality of the soil and eventually lead to damage to the land that can hardly be reversed.

Effects of Desertification and Land Degradation

Desertification can affect humans, plants and animals all the same, as the impact is extensive and usually causes a chain reaction, which can lead to a decrease of fertility in soils and, thus, environmental loss. For instance, in Africa, nearly 45% of the landmass is suffering from desertification and land degradation.²³ Land degradation can limit biodiversity, since it can incapacitate entire ecosystems by deranging their natural balance and reducing their water availability. The lack of biodiversity is caused due to the amendment and substitution of plant communities by species that naturally adapt better in hotter and drier conditions and are usual in desert environments, such as woody plants and invasive shrub species.

Biodiversity is really important for the balance of the ecosystems of this earth and its loss throws all ecosystems out of balance, making it each time harder to bounce back to normal. It is really important for preserving the ecosystem's health as well and the loss in biodiversity lowers the ecosystem's productivity, which is the amount of biomass that is produced by food energy. If an ecosystem has a major loss in biodiversity, it can become destabilized and collapse, transforming into a different ecosystem entirely that might not be as productive or fertile as the previous one.

Furthermore, desertification has a negative impact on agriculture, since the soil lacks the necessary nutrients for the plants' growth, which causes decreased crop yields, while at the same time soil salinization is caused, because irrigation methods leave behind heavy salts poisoning the earth. As a result, vulnerability to natural elements like wind, rain and temperature patterns is increased, which, in an ecosystem that is already weak, is likely to result in it collapsing when faced with challenges such as droughts, floods and other ecological elements.

The reduced access to feasible farmland and water sources augments competition and makes people more prone to violence, especially in regions that already face high conflicts. Furthermore, migration due to climate conditions has

²³What Is Desertification? Causes, Effects, And Solutions | [Earth.Org](https://earth.org/what-is-desertification/) ,<https://earth.org/what-is-desertification/> , Accessed August 15, 2026

already become a great issue, which is only going to worsen with global warming and desertification. Migration is estimated to cause disputes over the location of the new communities, combined with the growing overpopulation of the planet, as many people will be compelled to search for a better environment to live in that does not deal with the same problems.

The situation will be worsened by the loss of livelihood, since the regions affected by land desertification will be faced with rising rates of malnutrition and diseases. Human rights will be violated too, as individuals are being denied basic human rights like food, water and proper shelter. In those living conditions, surviving becomes people's main drive, as they leave behind their culture and focus on easy ways to generate income and find food instead of getting an education. In countries where undereducation is a pressing issue, humans are more prone to hate, racism, homophobia and sexism.

Cultural identities are also being threatened by desertification, as cultures like the indigenous people in America and afro-descendants depend on nature, which is slowly being destroyed by land degradation. These populations feel the loss of their local knowledge and sense of place, as well as the spiritual connection that they have felt with their land for hundreds of years.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Australia

Desertification is one of Australia's biggest environmental issues, as it is the driest continent with roughly 70% of the country being arid or semi-arid.²⁴ Australia has been managing to keep its lands fertile for thousands of years, regardless of its rough climate. The problems started in the 19th century, when they began practicing ill-suited methods for agriculture, influenced by certain European countries such as the United Kingdom, which were not suitable for Australia's climate and conditions. In the 20th century, the problem worsened with overgrazing, which now affects 40% of Australia's rangelands, and the intensification of agriculture, but also by severe dust storms that occurred in the middle of that century.²⁵ Nowadays, the issue has been sped up, due to climate change and the growing number of droughts and their higher frequency, as well as the unstable weather conditions.

It is also noted that deforestation has also had devastating results in the spread of desertification, with 50% of Australia's forest cover being extinguished and

²⁴Desertification in Australia: Definition, Causes and Environmental Impact, <https://www.accessep.com.au/blog/desertification>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

²⁵Desertification in Australia: Definition, Causes and Environmental Impact, <https://www.accessep.com.au/blog/desertification>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

3,920 square km of forests being cleared in just the period of 2017 to 2018.²⁶ Non-suitable watering techniques further help the problem accelerate, with it affecting over 5,500 square km of land.²⁷ In addition, bushfires have taken out over 170 thousand square km of land in 2019-2020, having long-term results on soil and greenery.²⁸ Overall, human factors account for approximately 10% of desertification in Australia.²⁹

China

In China, approximately 27,4% of land has been affected by land degradation and desertification, which has affected about 400 million people.³⁰ The desertification of China has rapidly increased ever since 1980, with recent studies showing that a quarter of the country is covered in desert. In Northwest China, the overgrazing of the areas that are covered by plants has resulted in mounds being deprived of their greenery and becoming really unstable. Additionally, due to water erosion in Loess Plateau, which is located in north-central China, there has been a huge soil loss because of the inability of the local environment to maintain water. As a result, the soil has been so corroded to the point where it is almost impossible to be fixed.

China is deeply influenced by the issue of land degradation and desertification to the point where entire communities are forced out of their homes due to the sandstorms and dust pollution. The sandstorms in Beijing were reported as “shrouding Beijing in a post-apocalyptic orange haze” as they “pelted the capital and spread as far as Central China”.³¹ Said sandstorm affected about 3.8 million square km of land across 12 of the 23 Chinese provinces, threatening the health of millions of people, as the huge amount of PM (particulate matter) in the air can affect the external organs and the respiratory system.

²⁶Desertification in Australia: Definition, Causes and Environmental Impact, <https://www.accessep.com.au/blog/desertification>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

²⁷Desertification in Australia: Definition, Causes and Environmental Impact, <https://www.accessep.com.au/blog/desertification>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

²⁸Desertification in Australia: Definition, Causes and Environmental Impact, <https://www.accessep.com.au/blog/desertification>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

²⁹Desertification in Australia: Definition, Causes and Environmental Impact, <https://www.accessep.com.au/blog/desertification>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

³⁰How These 5 Countries Are Fighting Desertification | [Earth.Org](https://earth.org) ,<https://earth.org/how-countries-are-fighting-desertification/> , August 19, 2026

³¹ China sandstorms highlight threat of climate crisis | Climate crisis | The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/03/china-sandstorms-highlight-threat-of-climate-crisis> , Date accessed July 23 2026

Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

Land degradation and desertification are an important issue in Cote d'Ivoire, with them affecting 60% of the national territory and up to 90% in the north.³² This situation has led to the decline of the number of arable lands and mass migrations towards areas that are located near forests in the south-west. Overall, from 2000 to 2010, there was a 11% degradation of the land noted, which accounts for 35,470.93 square km of soil.³³ In the years of 2000-2013, the forest area decreased by 4.21%, which is roughly 13,600 square km of forest.³⁴ At the same time, shrub savannas were reduced by 5,968 square km, while the wetlands and water bodies were reduced by 960 square km.³⁵ Since the 1960s, the country has lost approximately 80-90% of its natural forest cover, dropping from 160,000 to 30,000 square km today.³⁶

The main factor of land degradation in Ivory Coast is the deforestation for cocoa manufacturing and in general for agricultural purposes. More specifically, it has been estimated that about 70% of the country's illegal deforestation has been because of cocoa production and overall ⅓ of deforestation is because of cocoa.³⁷ Consequently, there is a mass loss of the biodiversity of the country that once had thousands of elephants roaming its lands, a number that has dropped to just the few hundred that survived the devastating destruction of their natural habitat.

Jordan

Jordan has a severe drought problem, with 90% of the country being presented with less than 20mm of rain yearly.³⁸ It is a semi-arid and apt to droughts country. The Badia area of Jordan is the centre of livestock production and most of its people depend solely on the rangeland to survive. However, Badia has been facing a lot of problems with desertification and land degradation, resulting in Badian farmers leaving for bigger cities, hence applying more pressure on the urban areas.

³²Land / Côte d'Ivoire | Interactive Country Fiches, <https://dicf.unepgrid.ch/cote-divoire/land>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

³³Land / Côte d'Ivoire | Interactive Country Fiches, <https://dicf.unepgrid.ch/cote-divoire/land>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

³⁴Land / Côte d'Ivoire | Interactive Country Fiches, <https://dicf.unepgrid.ch/cote-divoire/land>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

³⁵Land / Côte d'Ivoire | Interactive Country Fiches, <https://dicf.unepgrid.ch/cote-divoire/land>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

³⁶Land / Côte d'Ivoire | Interactive Country Fiches, <https://dicf.unepgrid.ch/cote-divoire/land>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

³⁷The Crumbling Empire of Chocolate | United Nations Development Programme, <https://www.undp.org/africa/waca/blog/crumbling-empire-chocolate>, Date accessed August 17, 2026

³⁸How These 5 Countries Are Fighting Desertification | Earth.Org, <https://earth.org/how-countries-are-fighting-desertification/>, Date accessed 17 August, 2026

Jordan has one of the world's biggest water deficiency problems, with the accessibility of water continuously decreasing per capita resources. Currently, it is 145 m³ per year.³⁹ It has been concluded that less than 5% of the country's land is tillable, resulting in the decline of agricultural activity.⁴⁰ According to the Department of Statistics, 93% of the country is influenced by non-cultivated areas that are categorized as rangeland, due to restrictions of climate, water accessibility, soil appropriateness and the surface that is covered by stones.⁴¹ Cultivated areas cover 2.7% of Jordan.⁴²

Land degradation in Jordan is a ruinous procedure that has a negative effect in the entire environmental landscape. It is mainly related to smallholder agricultural activities such as crop manufacture and rangeland management, which are unsustainable, as well as the over-abuse of greenery and the over-drainage of water that is found in the eastern and southern counties of Jordan.

Sahel region (Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Sudan, Eritrea)

An area that is extremely sensitive to the issue of land desertification is the Sahel, a semi-arid region which extends from the Atlantic Ocean in Senegal eastward to the Red Sea in Sudan. Over the span of a few decades, especially in the second half of the 20th century, that area has suffered a notable growth in desertification and land degradation. Africa loses 300,000 square km of forest every year, which leads to a 3% reduction in its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) yearly.⁴³ At the moment, more than 6,400 animal species and 3,100 plant species across Africa are facing extinction, making them classified as endangered, while more than 2.5 million people have been

³⁹to combat desertification in jordan - 2015 - 2020, page 21
<https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/naps/Jordan%2520-%2520eng%25202015-2020.pdf> , Date accessed August 17, 2026

⁴⁰to combat desertification in jordan - 2015 - 2020, page 21
<https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/naps/Jordan%2520-%2520eng%25202015-2020.pdf> , Date accessed August 17, 2026

⁴¹to combat desertification in jordan - 2015 - 2020, page 21
<https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/naps/Jordan%2520-%2520eng%25202015-2020.pdf> , Date accessed August 17, 2026

⁴²to combat desertification in jordan - 2015 - 2020, page 22
<https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/naps/Jordan%2520-%2520eng%25202015-2020.pdf> , Date accessed August 17, 2026

⁴³Desertification in North Africa: A Growing Threat to the Environment, Economy and Daily Life, subsection: economic losses
<https://www.greenpeace.org/mena/en/desertification-in-north-africa/> , Date accessed 17 August, 2026

forced to migrate across the Sahel region, which results in over of 75% of the displaced to live in beggarly conditions, with the deficiency of suitable housing.⁴⁴

Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)

The FAO is an agency of the UN that specializes in the management of food and agriculture and is in charge of multiple international initiatives in order to combat hunger. FAO's goal is to ensure food security and make high-quality food accessible to everyone and anytime in order for people to live their lives healthily and actively. There are 194 parties present at the FAO, with 193 of these parties being countries and the 194th party being the EU (European Union), taking place in about 130 countries all over the world.

FAO tackles desertification via their programme named "Action Against Desertification" (AAD). It is an initiative that plans to restore the drylands and make degraded lands fertile again to combat the harmful environmental effects of land degradation and desertification. It directly partners with the African programme, called the "Great Green Wall" initiative, which handles the impacts of climate change and desertification on the area of Sahel, as well as North Africa, the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa.

Tree Aid

Tree Aid is a nonprofit organization that utilizes the "power of trees" in order for both the people and planet to prosper. It strives to generate sustainable ways for food production, income earning and ecosystem rehabilitation. The organization mainly operates in Africa, working alongside the people that live there, heavily influenced by their various experiences and ideologies regarding the matter while also keeping in mind the vision that these people have for the future of their land.

Tree Aid achieves all of its goals by planting trees. Their goals include, but are not limited to environmental reinstation, protection of greenery (forests and lands), the normalisation of sustainable businesses that work with -instead of against- the natural environment and the augmentation of nutritious and organic food that has not only environmental benefits but also various health benefits.

⁴⁴Desertification in North Africa: A Growing Threat to the Environment, Economy and Daily Life, subsections: loss of biodiversity and forced migration
<https://www.greenpeace.org/mena/en/desertification-in-north-africa/> , Date accessed 17 August, 2026

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	EVENT
1949	The word desertification is used for the first time in West Africa
1968-1974	Drought in Sahel
August 29 - September 9, 1977	First time the issue of desertification was addressed in the UN, in Nairobi, Kenya
1991	UNEP issued a report that noted the intensification of land degradation
June 3-June 14, 1992	The first time desertification was formally addressed as a major problem
December 22, 1992	The term “desertification” was officially defined by the UN
June 17, 1994	The term “desertification” was expanded by the addition of the phrase “climatic fluctuations”
2006	International Year of Deserts and Desertification
September 3- September 14, 2007	UNCCD releases research results that show how many people are affected by desertification and launches 10-year plan to combat it
25 September 2015	The UN passes a resolution about a 2030 Agenda with goals to be fulfilled by 2030, the SDGs (Agenda for sustainable development)
19 December 2024	The UN passes a resolution in order to combat desertification and land degradation

RELEVANT UN TREATIES, CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Resolution A/RES/70/1: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

This resolution, adopted by the GA (General Assembly) on 25 September 2015, outlines a global action plan for the prosperity of the people and the planet, built around 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 specific targets to be achieved by 2030. Desertification is addressed in SDG 15, which is named “Protect,

restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.”.⁴⁵ This goal stresses the importance of combating desertification and land degradation for the future of our planet. The goals that are included in this resolution are anthropocentric and they opt for growth in three dimensions: economic, social and environmental.

Resolution A/RES/79/207: Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa

This resolution, adopted on December 19th 2024 without a vote, reaffirmed global commitments to stop land degradation and alleviate the impacts of drought. It highlighted the importance of addressing land degradation and desertification, more specifically droughts, in order for sustainable development goals to be accomplished and poverty to be reduced due to the erosion of the soil. The resolution further reaffirmed the priority given to the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification in Africa, noting the urgent need for technical, financial and capacity-building support in the countries there. In the resolution, Member States and the international community are urged to quicken their actions based on their commitments towards land restoration, sustainable land management and drought resilience.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

The UNCCD is the only unyielding foundation set up that applies to desertification and highlights the effects of drought. There are 197 participations to the convention, including 196 country participations and the 197th participation being the EU (European Union). The Convention, based on the fundamentals of participation, is a versatile dedication to help better the effects of land degradation and shelter the land, so that food, water and shelter can be provided for all the people.

UNCCD brings governments, scientists, and policymakers together in order to reinstate and control the world's land. This work is highly important to establish the planet's viability and the well-being of the next generations, converting the earth into a habitat with a balanced amount of degraded and restored land, with healthy landscapes and protected biodiversity.

⁴⁵Document Viewer | United Nations, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/70/1>, Date accessed July 17, 2026

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

China's Great Green Wall

The “Great Green Wall” also known as the “Three-North Shelterbelt Forest Programme” is a program enforced by the Chinese government in order to halt desertification in China. It is the world’s biggest man-made forest, which started out in 1978, and the goal is for it to be completed by 2050, when approximately 100 billion trees will have been planted, stretching out for 4,500km.⁴⁶ It mainly consists of strips and patches of trees that are planted all over north China in order to reduce the dust storms and slow them down, as they break up the soil and lessen the farming capacity of the area that they hit. The trees also work as stabilisers to sand dunes so as for them not to be as feeble to the weather elements such as wind.

Research has shown that there was a direct link between the augmentation of greenery and the lowered DSI (Dust Storm Intensity) numbers.⁴⁷ Dust storm frequency has dropped methodically since 1971. However, that data is only accurate in the northern areas of China, and these results are not noted everywhere, as there still are some regions in the country that suffer from severe dust storms.

The Great Green Wall of Africa

The Great Green Wall of Africa was initiated in 2007 by the African Union (AU) and was originally a barrier that stretches across 7,000km in order to restrain the Sahara and Sahel deserts and keep them from expanding and demolishing all the greenery in the surrounding areas. This project has managed to rehabilitate 40,000 square km of land in its strict intervention zones, which are the specific, targeted local project sites that lie along a 8.000 km long and 15 km wide path where active restoration, tree planting and soil reform take place.⁴⁸ Overall, 180,000 square km of land have been reinstated due to the initiative, which is approximately 4% of its target of restoring 1,000,000 square km of land. Additionally, the project has created over 350,000 new job opportunities across the country.⁴⁹

⁴⁶China's Great Green Wall | RGS

<https://www.rgs.org/schools/resources-for-schools/chinas-great-green-wall> , Date accessed 15 August 2026

⁴⁷China's Great Green Wall | RGS

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⁴⁸Growing the Great Green Wall - International Partnerships, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/growing-great-green-wall_en , Date accessed 15 August 2026

⁴⁹China's Great Green Wall | RGS

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Nonetheless, many problems have occurred due to lack of funding, which has affected the progress of the project. While this is considered a great initiative, lack of support, both financial and technical, and intention to see it through have taken a toll in its effectiveness and its speed. It is noted that, without the proper funds from the African countries, the project might fail, even though it has opened a world of opportunities, such as progress in agriculture, more sustainable food production, healthier food and overall, more job opportunities for the countries that realize its potential.

Amazon Conservation

The Amazon conservation project has been in effect for the past 25 years in the grounds of Peru and Bolivia. The idea behind it started in the 1980s, when burning rainforests in Brazil attracted attention worldwide to the crisis that the Amazon was facing. A program, however, did not launch until the 1990s, when the attempts became more systematic. The aforementioned founding program issued support for Brazilian nut harvesters in Peru as a motivation for providing protection for the forest.

Their focus is on the protection of wildlife, the empowerment of local people with the use of science and technology, having the ultimate goal of restoring the Amazon rainforest. Nowadays, they have protected over 3.298 square km of the rainforest,⁵⁰ while manufacturing and supplying pioneering tools to government and forest users in order to safeguard their lands. Lastly, they have sanctioned hundreds of indigenous communities to live more forest-friendly lives and hosted thousands of scientists with innovative research.

Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs)

Indigenous people have been made guardians for more than 40% of Australia's reserves.⁵¹ Indigenous Protected Areas are zones of land and sea that are protected for biodiversity conservation and managed by indigenous people. They have the necessary agreements with the Australian government in order to be able to take initiative to protect such areas. IPAs consist of one of the most essential parts of Australia's National Reserve System, which comprises formally recognized parks, reserves and protected areas all across the country. Currently, there are 78 dedicated IPAs in over 740,000 square km of land, which account for about 46% of the Natural Reserve System.⁵²

⁵⁰Mission and Vision | Amazon Conservation Association Protection Efforts, <https://www.amazonconservation.org/about/mission-vision/>, Date accessed 15 August 2026

⁵¹How These 5 Countries Are Fighting Desertification | [Earth.Org](https://earth.org), <https://earth.org/how-countries-are-fighting-desertification/>, Date accessed 15 August 2026

⁵²How These 5 Countries Are Fighting Desertification | [Earth.Org](https://earth.org), <https://earth.org/how-countries-are-fighting-desertification/>, Date accessed 15 August 2026

Indigenous People have presented a great resiliency and adaptability in working alongside and pushing against colonial frameworks in order to upkeep and enhance IPAs. Indigenous lands have greater biodiversity, as about 60% of the country's 1,574 threatened species can be found in Indigenous lands.⁵³ Their success is a result of their practices, which depend on their deep comprehension and respect for ecosystems, while promoting sustainable resource use. In addition, their methods have minimal impact on the environment and are easily adaptable to ecological changes, resulting in healthy and resilient ecosystems. For instance, in Australia, they practice traditional fire management, widely known as “cultural burning” or “cool burning”, to manage the landscape.⁵⁴ This practice uses the controlled use of low-intensity fires in order to limit fuel loads, manage vegetation and advance biodiversity. Indigenous people have a deep understanding of behavior of the fire element, weather patterns and ecological responses, which gives them the ability to manage such a process safely, while lowering wildfire risks. Therefore, it is apparent that this project is bringing fruitful and unique solutions and is helping protect the lands from desertification and land degradation.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Make agriculture sustainable

Unsuitable agricultural techniques or unsustainable practices in general are major contributors to the issue of desertification and land degradation. These practices may have better short-term results and they may be cheaper, but long-term they spoil the quality of the soil and they lead to its infertility. Governments will have to fund the shift from unsustainable methods to sustainable ones, but such a shift will be an investment for the country's land integrity and will lead to more agricultural profits for the country, especially in nations that depend on agriculture.

Crop rotation is a sustainable agricultural method that switches the types of plants in a field every season to stop the bugs from spoiling the product and keep the soil rich and free of chemicals. Another sustainable practice is to cover crops that grow plants such as clover in the off-seasons in order to protect the soil from wind and rain and keep it intact. Finally, a sustainable way to practice agriculture is no-till farming, which stops the heavy plowing to keep the structure of the ground firm and hold in its moisture.

⁵³UBC researchers find Indigenous lands can outperform protected areas on conservation, <https://news.ubc.ca/2026/05/indigenous-lands-outperform-protected-areas-on-conservation/>, Date accessed 15 August 2026

⁵⁴Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here's why, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/indigenous-knowledge-crucial-fight-against-climate-change-heres-why>, Date accessed 15 August 2026

Bring nature back to cities

Urbanization is one of the main drives of desertification and land degradation, as it is frequently followed by the tearing down of forests. Cities consume the planet's resources faster than the planet can generate them. Therefore, with the creation of a space of greenery in cities, natural resources will be produced faster, whilst enhancing air quality, water quality and overall helping to brighten up the monotonous cities. It will further help to preserve the biodiversity of the area, since hundreds of species which lost their homes because of the establishment of cities can now be reinstated once more.

Improve water conservation

Water plays a very crucial part in the issue of desertification, as one of its many causes is the lack thereof. It is key in every ecosystem, while clean water is even more important and hard to come across. Nowadays, it is wasted and utilised carelessly in agriculture, without the realization that its use can be extremely beneficial for the soil. Water erosion is a big factor of land degradation as well, so it is absolutely necessary to protect clean water. Such a goal can be achieved by practices such as a drip irrigation system that loses no water to run-off, delivering water and nutrients directly to the plant's root zone, in the right amounts, at the right time, so each plant gets exactly what it needs, when it needs it.⁵⁵

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