



THE NOTES OF SUD

Fight Desertification to Deal with Climate Change

As it assumes the presidency of the Council of the European Union, France can be a driver of change at major international events in 2022, such as the World Water Forum and the COP15 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Climate change is seriously affecting arid zones, but civil society organizations are finding evidence that numerous benefits can be gained by implementing agroecology and concerted management of natural resources. There is urgent need to better support their fight against land degradation.



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1 CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY, AND DESERTIFICATION

“Desertification” is defined as land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid zones.¹ It is caused by a variety of factors, including climate variations and human activities. One third of the world’s human population live in drylands, which account for more than 40% of the world’s

land surface. “Desertification” does not refer to the spreading of desert, but to a gradual decrease in the quality of the soil and an impoverishment of the life contained in it. This destruction of the soil results in a loss of its fertility and therefore has negative effects on the environment and on the living conditions of local people. >>>

1. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 1994.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and desertification are closely related and interdependent phenomena. Because soils are carbon and biodiversity sinks, their degradation has repercussions on the climate and on biological diversity. Similarly, climate change and loss of biodiversity can contribute to soil erosion, which can lead to desertification in the long term.

AGROECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS TO DEAL WITH DROUGHT

The Avaclim project, coordinated by CARI, seeks to create the conditions needed to implement agroecology in arid zones. As part of the project, initiatives are being evaluated in eight countries. This multi-criteria evaluation has shown that an agroecological system in arid zones helps reduce the effects of drought. Agroecology has several benefits: a soil structure with a high water-retention capacity is maintained, water-saving strategies are implemented, and certain crops adapted to water shortages are maintained thanks to genetic diversity.

One of the initiatives with particularly positive impacts involved the setting up of a land-restoration process called *recaatingamento*, based on concerted resource management and collective grazing.² It was initiated by local communities, research institutions and social movements in the *caatinga* (an arid region of the Nordeste region of Brazil).

// Factor for land degradation can be land-use policies //

Soil degradation does not occur suddenly: it is a gradual process that results from various practices and phenomena. Poor agricultural practices such as intensive exploitation of soils, reduction of fallow lands, and poor use of irrigation are degradation factors. Deforestation is also a factor, as it exposes soils to erosion, especially the most common type, water erosion. Additionally, increased pressure on pastureland due to overgrazing alters the production and diversity of vegetation on exposed lands.

2 HEIGHTENED INEQUALITY

Desertification has consequences not only on the environment, but also on local populations. Indeed, the livelihoods of rural and urban societies are linked to the quality and diversity of resources provided by ecosystems. Desertification impacts food security by reducing the accessibility and availability of water, pasture, and forest resources. It can lead to increased tensions over the use of these resources, possibly leading to conflict situations. The consequences of desertification do not affect women and men in the same way and in the same areas. In arid zones, scarcer resources often lead to an increase in the burden and difficulty of women's work.

Land degradation also affects pastoral areas. Pastoralism is the source of subsistence of a significant proportion of people living in drylands. This type of livestock raising is based on herd mobility, which enables access to a wide range of forage resources in time and space. However, grazing land in drylands can be very dependent on rainfall variations, and its productivity can double from one year to the next. Thus, in bad years, herds put increased pressure on land with dense vegetation cover, i.e., land sometimes used for crops. When this occurs, herders compete with farmers for resource use. Another factor for land degradation can be land-use policies that do not include the complementarity nature of different productive activities.



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2. CARI, *Avaclim project factsheets*, 2020: <https://avaclim.org/en/factsheets/>

AGRO-SYLVO-PASTORALISM SOLUTIONS

The GITE project,³ managed by Grdr supports intermunicipal management of natural resources in Guidimakha and Gorgol in Mauritania, based on a shared knowledge of environmental issues by local stakeholders (users, elected officials, the administration). Various data were produced from a system for monitoring the dynamics of the environment (herbaceous and tree cover, ponds) and integrated into the multi-stakeholder consultations. They provide objective elements for territorial planning.

The project also supports the improvement of land productivity by drawing up land agreements⁴ and the building of surface-water infrastructure (filtering dikes, stone barriers). Other activities to support production practices by taking into account the potential of ecosystems are developed, including the sustainable development of non-timber forest products and support for agroecology in rainfed and market gardening. These initiatives provide concrete solutions for food security and for building the local population's resilience to climate change.

3 INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

One of the three Rio Conventions⁵ is the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, adopted on June 17, 1994.⁶ Its goal is to improve land productivity and to work toward the restoration, conservation and sustainable management of land and water resources, which will lead to improved living conditions. It is closely linked to reaching Sustainable Development Goal 15.3 on achieving a land degradation-neutral world. Its secretariat is responsible for facilitating and catalyzing financing for the fight against desertification, especially that for the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and Sahel. This initiative should help improve the living conditions of the people of the Sahara and Sahel, by preserving the ecosystems of African drylands.

The Conference of the Parties, which is the decision-making body of the Convention, will have its fifteenth



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meeting in May 2022 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Civil society organizations, which have long been involved in the Convention, will deliver a joint message on this occasion, developed within the framework of the actions and summit meeting of "Desertif'actions."⁷

THE VALUE-CHAIN SOLUTION

The FARE project, coordinated by Planète Urgence, supports the restoration of degraded areas around the Bénoué National Park in Cameroon.⁸ Consisting mainly of Sudano-Sahelian savannah ecosystems, it is home to a large number of important animal species of this type of habitat. To preserve and restore the environment of this area at high risk of desertification and to increase the resilience of the nearby communities, the partner organization CERAF-Nord is restoring wildlife migration corridors via agroforestry development based on the reforestation of cashew trees.

The goal of the project is to strengthen the capacity of producers in cultivation techniques, plantation monitoring and nursery maintenance. It also provides for supporting producers in the building of value chains via support for producer groups, with the aim of optimizing storage, warehouses, and collective sales. The project aims to use the income generated to improve living conditions, particularly during hunger gaps.

3. Grdr, Intermunicipal environmental management for agro-sylvo-pastoral adaptation to climate change (*Gestion intercommunale de l'environnement pour l'adaptation agrosylvopastorale au changement climatique - GITE*): <https://www.grdr.org/gestion-Intercommunale-de-l-environnement-pour-l-adaptation-agro-sylvo>

4. Inter-réseaux, *Inégalités foncières et agriculture familiale en Mauritanie*, 2011: <https://www.inter-reseaux.org/publication/54-56-les-cereales-au-coeur-de-la-souverainete-alimentaire-en-afrique-louest/inegalites-foncieres-et-agriculture-familiale-en-mauritanie/>

5. Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

6. The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought is celebrated each June 17.

7. International Civil Society Summit: www.desertif-actions.org

8. Planète Urgence, Cashew nut sector & ecosystem restoration in Cameroon: <https://planete-urgence.org/projet-fare-filiere-anacarde-restauration-decosystemes-au-cameroun/>

4 FRANCE'S COMMITMENTS

In 2020, France adopted a framework of strategic guidelines to fight land degradation and desertification internationally from now until 2030.⁹ This framework must guide the actions of government ministries, development operators, the research community, and local authorities, so that they contribute to strengthening sustainable land management and the fight against desertification, thereby benefiting the most vulnerable populations and ecosystems.

In this framework, France states that it promotes agroecology as a tool to fight land degradation and supports the transfer of powers from central governments to local authorities in the field of sustainable land management. These guidelines target vulnerable groups such as women and youth. Like other vulnerable groups (indigenous peoples, pastoralist communities, etc.), women and youth face specific problems in terms of access to and use of the natural resources upon which their lifestyles, economies, and cultures are based. ●

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FRENCH PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

- ▶ Work to increase European Union funding for field and research projects to promote agroecology and the fight against land degradation, particularly via multi-country projects (by supporting development stakeholders and increasing cascade funding in particular).
- ▶ Work to ensure that the European Union is politically and financially involved in the Great Green Wall Initiative in the Sahara and Sahel, including with funding targeting the smallest-scale stakeholders of development projects.
- ▶ Carry out transparent monitoring of the way in which all of France's development-policy institutions implement the strategic orientations to fight land degradation and desertification internationally.
- ▶ Now that we are at the start of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, land restoration should include the crucial support needed to avoid and reduce land degradation.

9. Desertification working group, "How France fights desertification" (*Comment la France lutte contre la désertification ?*), 2021: <https://youtu.be/mIT0hSt8-mc>



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The CCD's objective is to promote the integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation issues, in line with sustainable development goals, in development projects. It produces knowledge in connection with the world of research, builds common positions for effective advocacy and proposes capitalizations based on the experiences of the NGO members of the commission.

It groups the following organizations: Action Contre la Faim, ActionAid France, Acting for Life, Agrisud International, ATD Quart Monde, Association La Voûte Nubienne, AVSF, Bolivia Inti-Sud Soleil, CARE France, CARI, CRID, Électriciens Sans Frontières, Entrepreneurs du Monde, Fondation France Libertés, Fondation GoodPlanet, Fondem, Forim, France Volontaires, Geres, Grdr, Gret, Initiative Développement, Oxfam France, Planète Urgence and WWF, as well as the following invited organisations all4trees, Coalition Eau, Croix-Rouge française, RAC-France, RePR.

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