

Desertification Day Climate Risk Management Can Reduce Land Degradation

Press StatementIn advance of Desertification Day, June 17th

Contacts: Roger Morier +1-202-473-5675 Rmorier@worldbank.org

Kristyn Schrader +1-202-458-2736 Kschrader@worldbank.org

WASHINGTON, June 14, 2007 – On the occasion of the United Nations’ Desertification Day, and with over 250 million people directly affected by desertification and drought and one billion people in over 100 countries at risk, the World Bank today urged partner countries to integrate comprehensive climate risk management into development planning, programs, and projects – thus providing an opportunity to reduce land degradation – and called on rich countries to provide more financial support to reverse the present trend.

“Climate variability and change can, and does, exacerbate land degradation,” said Warren Evans, Director of Environment, World Bank. “We are actively implementing and advocating a risk management approach to combat desertification. The initial emphasis is on minimizing the risk to development and human livelihood posed by present climatic extremes.”

“The current global focus on climate change,” said Evans, “and the availability of additional funds for adaptation provide a unique opportunity to act. However, much more is needed. Countries can improve their strategies and action plans for a more coordinated effort at the national level on sustainable development and a reduction in desertification/land degradation.”

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) confirmed that desertification is potentially the most threatening ecosystem change impacting livelihoods of the poor. More than 100 countries, many of them among the least developed, including Niger, Mali, China, Pakistan,

India, Brazil, and Chile, lie entirely or partly within drylands – arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas.

“The challenge is considerable,” emphasized Evans. “Forty percent of the earth’s land surface is categorized as drylands, and over 25 percent of the world’s peoples live there. Forty percent of Africa’s population is based in drylands, but 39 percent of Asians – 1.3 billion people – and 30 percent of South Americans also live in similar environments, and face similar risks.”

The scale of the land degradation challenge calls for sustained and collective action by the international community through the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) which was created to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in member countries.

At the county level, land rehabilitation measures contribute to improved local land productivity and livelihoods, while also enhancing climate change management and tapping revenues from the carbon market. The Bank’s Carbon Finance Program has demonstrated the potential of market-based public/private initiatives to invest significantly in sustainable land management that provides measurable local and global benefits. The Carbon Finance portfolio has projects that respond directly to the challenge of land degradation, such as a soil conservation project in Moldova, a watershed rehabilitation project in the Philippines, an afforestation project in Romania, and an assisted natural regeneration project in Albania.

Developing countries with the support of the World Bank continue to invest in land management. Between FY01 and FY06, the Bank committed US\$1.4 billion for projects in natural resources management, with US\$701 million specifically aimed at land management. Examples of the most recent (March 2007) installation of such investments, which are twinning poverty alleviation and the fight against desertification/land degradation, include:

- The US\$86 million Western Kenya Community Driven Development (CDD) and Flood Mitigation Project will provide technical support and funding for income-generating micro projects in 600 communities, including 200 projects earmarked for youth groups. Over one million community members will directly benefit from CDD activities. Another 1,000 communities will receive support for economically viable investments which encourage the sustainable use of water and other natural resources, including investing in community-based catchment management so as to reduce vulnerability to recurrent flooding.

- The US\$68.5 million Natural Resource Management Project in Kenya aims to reverse watershed degradation in catchment areas of national strategic importance, and manage forest resources.

Women play a critical role in combating desertification/land degradation Meeting world food needs in the future will depend increasingly on strengthening the capabilities and resources of women. Approximately 98 percent of rural women classified as economically active are engaged in agriculture and are the primary food producers in many parts of the world. Women make up 60 percent of the world's 1.2 billion poor. The percentage of women below the poverty line has increased by half since the 1970s, while the comparable figure for men is 30 percent. It is, therefore, crucial to strengthen awareness and support with respect to women and vulnerable groups in land management activities.

Long term dialogue on desertification is vital Regional and country strategies and development frameworks – i.e., Country Assistance Strategies (CASs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) – allow various national government agencies, community organizations, and funding agencies to work together.

Promoting programmatic approaches in addressing desertification “We need to move from project by project work,” said Mark Cackler, (Acting) Director for Agriculture and Rural

Development, World Bank, “to programmatic approaches. This is something that can really make a difference in sustaining the efforts to combat desertification.”

The Bank, with partners such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and partner countries, has recently embarked on a more strategic and programmatic approach to address desertification/land degradation. The programmatic approach can explore opportunities for regional efforts and share lessons learned on effective strategies for combating desertification. An example of this is the TerrAfrica initiative (www.terrafrica.org), which promotes scaled up, harmonized support for effective country-driven sustainable land management in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Bank is also facilitating public-private sector partnerships to provide rural communities with access to markets for ecosystem services that result from improved land and natural resource management approaches.

For more information, please visit:

[Land resources management](#)

www.worldbank.org/gef