

Sixth GEF Assembly

Statement from Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Mr. President,

Madame Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the GEF,

Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to address this Assembly on behalf of Madame Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary, who could not make it to Danang, due to unforeseen circumstances. She asked me to convey her best wishes to this gathering taking place in Vietnam, one of the countries whose leading role in reclaiming degraded environment can inspire many of the nations present here.

Mr. President,

This Assembly takes place at a critical juncture for the international community's efforts to address environmental degradation and the challenges of development. The 2030 Agenda has provided us with a path towards better integration of the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. How the global community works together over the next decade to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals will have an immense impact on the lives of future generations.

We are happy that the GEF continues to evolve to be at the forefront of this global response and that it is facilitating countries' integrated approaches to address environmental challenges. The fact that more than 50% of GEF-6 funding has been provided for multi-focal area projects reflects a more integrated approach and we commend the work done by the GEF secretariat in responding to country demand for this paradigm shift.

We note also the role of land in integrating all of the GEF's focal areas. This is in fact reflected in the Programming Directions document prepared by the Secretariat, highlighting the synergies arising from the links between land and

biodiversity, and land and climate change. Indeed, investments in the land degradation focal area are quick impacts yielders. As highlighted by the recent independent evaluation study “Value for Money Analysis for Land degradation projects of the GEF”, by investing more resources in land, the GEF can help deliver on multiple goals and benefits in a more strategic and effective manner, and achieve a higher return on its investment.

Mr. President,

We wish therefore to encourage all decision makers gathered here to make efficient use of the GEF resources allocated to focal areas in a way that maximizes impacts on populations and ecosystems affected by land degradation. We invite decision makers to pool GEF resources together to address the implementation of the three Rio Conventions and encourage focal points to work in unison, by developing comprehensive and transformative projects to address biodiversity loss, land degradation, as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation.

When it comes to land issues, we must not lose sight of the most vulnerable people. To be impactful, sustainable and effective, land investments must benefit land users, in particular small land holders and other at-risk populations. As such, it is our hope that the GEF 7 cycle will address land degradation to empower populations in these areas to improve their living standards by enabling sustainable economic activities in harmony with the environment. Women, especially those living in rural areas, must be given priority for they are key players for any transformative action. In this respect, we see land-based projects to incentivize rural jobs creation, especially in regions facing radicalism, instability, and forced migrations such as the Sahel region, as critical to address some of the most vexing problems of today. Well managed land will create employment opportunities; contribute to alleviating poverty in rural areas and enabling young generations and women to improve their conditions and ecosystems. It will also facilitate food security and resilience to climate change.

Mr. President, we also note the renewed strategy of the GEF to increase private sector engagement. The environmental challenges that we face today are of such magnitude that it is essential to also crowd-in private sector resources. The

UNCCD has in fact spearheaded the development of an impact investment fund, the LDN Fund, to enable sustainable business activities that address land degradation. We look forward to the GEF's continued support for this Fund as an innovative vehicle in support of areas that traditionally have not benefited from private investments. The lessons learned in this process could underpin further strategies to create other impact funds to support global environmental benefits.

Another area of increasing interest in the UNCCD is promoting resilience of local communities to droughts. During the upcoming cycle, the GEF community should enhance its intervention in this area by investing in early-warning systems, vulnerability and risk assessment as well as drought risk mitigation.

Mr. President, Ministers, distinguished delegates,

In closing, while in absolute terms the resources allocated to the land degradation focal area may not match the level of need, we welcome the relative increase to the focal area during GEF-7. We are convinced that managing sustainably our land resources constitutes the best bet to safeguard our planet for present and future generations. Now more than before, we witness a great momentum to address land degradation. In the Convention process, we have over 120 countries which have already set their targets to reach land degradation neutrality. They need support. And we are sure the GEF will play an instrumental role to help countries achieve their targets by providing catalytic funding. We encourage the GEF to be part of this journey through stronger support to the land degradation focal area, the integrator of other GEF focal areas and the accelerator to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development. 2030 is closer than we think and we must act now.

Thank you for your attention.