

our planet

The magazine of the United Nations Environment Programme — September 2011



ABDELAZIZ BOUTEFLIKA
UNIVERSAL STRUGGLE

ZHOU SHENGXIA
SHIELDING
ECOLOGICAL SECURITY

ANGELA CROPPER
SEIZE THE MOMENT

JEFFREY SACHS
IN THE FRONT LINE

JOHANN ROCKSTRÖM
COMMON BOUNDARIES



GLOBAL COMMONS

The planet we share



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PO Box 30552, Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: (254 20) 762 1234

Fax: (254 20) 762 3927

e-mail: unepub@unep.org

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Editor : Geoffrey Lean

Coordinator : Mia Turner

Distribution Manager : Mohamed Atani

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The drylands are already bearing the brunt of climate change with effects on poverty, health, hunger and peace itself.



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Governance of the global Commons is needed to ensure that humanity does not cross the safe boundaries of what the planet can tolerate.



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Simply protecting and managing naturally regenerating trees has increased food production and reduced conflict.



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KELLY LEVIN and MANISH BAPNA : Adapting the Commons

Climate change presents the greatest challenge to the wellbeing of the Commons, but governments are adopting

books

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World Resources Report 2011: Decision Making in a Changing Climate

World Resources Institute, United Nations Environment Programme,
United Nations Development Programme, World Bank

This exercise by WRI, UNEP, UNDP and the World Bank provides policymakers around the world - government, civil society, and business - with analysis and insight about major environmental and development issues. Already, the world is experiencing the destructive effects of rising global temperatures, altered rainfall patterns and extreme weather. Short term, such impacts create pressing needs for disaster relief, such as followed the recent unprecedented floods in Pakistan and heatwave in Russia. Longer term effects will continue for decades, with intensifying and wide-ranging impacts on agriculture, water supplies and other ecosystems, and human habitation. To build climate resilience, developing country national decision makers urgently need to integrate climate change risks into planning and policies across sectors such as agriculture, electricity production and forestry and water management.

Adapting for a Green Economy: Companies, Communities and Climate Change

Samantha Putt del Pino, Eliot Metzger, Sally Prowitt, United Nations Global Compact, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and Oxfam

This report is a resource for companies with a national, regional or global reach that are interested in increasing their strategic focus on adaptation in developing countries where they have operations, supply chains, employees and current or potential customers.

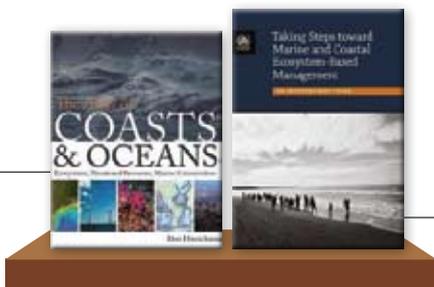
This report is also aimed at national and international policymakers involved in climate change and sustainable development dialogues and decision-making, including those who will participate in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio+20). It is hoped that the report's findings will be useful for a much wider range of actors as well, including small, local businesses in developing countries that are on the front line of climate impacts; civil society organizations seeking to strengthen their work around climate change and sustainable development; and sub-national policymakers, who are in a key position to shape a productive interface among government, communities and businesses.

Africa Water Atlas

Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA/UNEP)

This Atlas is a visual account of Africa's endowment and use of water resources, revealed through 224 maps and 104 satellite images as well as some 500 graphics and hundreds of compelling photos. However, the Atlas is more than a collection of static maps and images accompanied by informative facts and figures: its visual elements vividly illustrate a succinct narrative describing and analyzing Africa's water issues and exemplifying them through the judicious use of case studies. It gathers information about water in Africa and its role in the economy and development, health, food security, transboundary cooperation, capacity building and environmental change into one comprehensive and accessible volume.

UNEP undertook the production of this Atlas at the request of the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) and in cooperation with the African Union, European Union, United States' State Department, United States Geological Survey and other collaborators.



The Atlas of Coasts and Oceans Mapping Ecosystems, Threatened Resources and Marine Conservation

Don Hinrichsen.

The Atlas of Coasts and Oceans is a comprehensive assessment of the challenges faced in the governance of the blue planet; a global common resource. It details the ecological, environmental and economic importance of each of the world's coasts and oceans. The impact of climate change, industrial growth, tourism, pollution and over-fishing as well as the steps being taken towards conservation are well illustrated with global and regional maps, from the Arabian Gulf to the Great Barrier Reef and including the Baltic, the Black Sea, the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the South Pacific and all the other major global waterways. It is a timely contribution to the understanding of marine science.

Taking Steps toward Marine and Coastal Ecosystem-Based Management – An Introductory Guide

Tundi Agardy, John Davis, Kristin Sherwood, Ole Vestergaard

The Guide outlines operational considerations in an accessible language, drawing upon practical experiences and lessons across the globe - from tropical coastlines to temperate estuaries and polar ocean ecosystems. An important message is that this is an incremental process and there are different paths toward Ecosystem-Based Management. Cross boundary considerations and working with neighbours and even countries far away will be an essential component.



Achim Steiner

UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UNEP

With less than nine months to go before the Rio+20 conference, international momentum is building as a result of growing understanding of the need to re-think economies and reform an international system of governance that is falling short of what is required. On issues ranging from desertification to biodiversity loss, current responses and the institutions established to facilitate them are struggling to keep up with the magnitude and velocity of environmental, social and economic change.

Governments, civil society and business are meeting under an agreed timetable to follow a road map to sharpen and shape their positions on Rio+20's twin themes — the Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and an institutional framework for sustainable development. October's meeting of the desertification convention, for example, will include a focus on livelihoods in drylands and sustainable agriculture.

Across all the issues nothing is clear cut: But there is some coalescing of possible transformative, cooperative proposals — from scaling up clean energies to new ways of managing the oceans, freshwater, food security, and disaster preparedness.

To date the main focus has been on the Green Economy. One key issue is tackling fossil fuel subsidies: by some estimates, these range from \$400-\$600 billion a year — or four times what it would cost to bring Official Development Assistance up to the 0.7 per cent target. Another is green procurement: on average public purchasing accounts for 23 per cent of GDP worldwide, enough — it is thought — to tip entire markets onto a more sustainable track. Other such areas under consideration range from reforming bilateral investment agreements that hinder the adoption of clean energy to developing a smarter indicator of wealth that goes beyond GDP.

Meanwhile governments from Kenya and Germany to Malaysia and France are signaling support for strengthening or upgrading UNEP to boost the environmental pillar of sustainable development. Other governance proposals include transforming the Commission on Sustainable Development into a Council or merging its functions in a strengthened UN Economic and Social Council.

The missing overall link so far is broad political support. Brazil, however, is signaling its determination to provide leadership as are several African, Asian and European heads of state. If more like-minded leaders — including from civil society — demonstrate their backing, there is every chance that the promise of Rio 1992 can be finally transformed into profound outcomes, reflecting a fresh sense of purpose unfolding among nations to put sustainability both front and centre stage.



Luc Gnacadja

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Soil, featured prominently in this issue of Our Planet, is a critical part of the global commons. Productive land is pivotal in the survival of life on Earth, yet 12 million hectares of it is lost every year due to desertification and drought. Over the next 25 years, such losses may reduce global food production by up to 12 per cent, increasing world prices by as much as 30 per cent. If we are serious about moving to a Green Economy, in which agriculture and food security are embedded in sustainable development, we must switch to sustainable land-use practices. To do so, the global dimension of desertification and land degradation must be

recognized at all levels. Without healthy soils, we will lose other global commons like water and biodiversity.

Soil's importance as a global common has yet to be anchored in the minds of decision makers. But there are signs of change. On 20 September, world leaders will gather at the United Nations General Assembly in New York for a high level-meeting on addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. The time is ripe for a paradigm shift that takes land and soil as finite resources. The current famine and drought in the Horn of Africa reminds us that building the resilience of the drylands communities and pursuing sustainable land management globally are critical to the future well-being of a civilized international society in the 21st century. The cost of action today is far less than the future costs from inaction.

In practical terms, this means pursuing a target that makes history of the loss of land — such as for example, 'zero net land degradation' as part of the global sustainable development target. The long-term sustainability of productive land is under threat, but together, we can reverse the trend if we act swiftly. Now, more than ever, the international community must intensify its efforts to forge a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification and land degradation, and to mitigate the effects of drought. Poverty reduction and environmental sustainability will be among the quick and lasting returns on our investment.

Universal struggle



ABDELAZIZ BOUTEFLIKA

President,
the Republic of Algeria



Desertification and land degradation are like climate change and biological diversity, major challenges for the 21st century. Indeed, they are even more complex because they are multidimensional phenomena underlain by diverse factors, especially climatic variations and human activities.

These phenomena have irreversible economic and social consequences. They deprive hundreds of millions of people

of the land that nourishes them, thus creating additional sources of tension and exacerbating migrations. International responsibility is undoubtedly engaged in the fight against desertification, drought and land degradation. In fact, the universal struggle against them is an urgent burden on us all, since they lead to forced migrations and challenge social stability, moving us further away from the objectives of sustainable development.



“The success of this struggle requires the implementation of the three conventions (on climate change, biodiversity and desertification) agreed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.”

The success of this struggle requires the implementation of the three conventions (on climate change, biodiversity and desertification) agreed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. This will also depend on the funding and green technologies that wealthy countries agree to make available to the least fortunate countries.

Africa is the hardest hit region. Numerous studies show that our continent will lose two-thirds of its arable land by 2025, in the absence of urgent and effective measures therefore destroying its efforts for both development and environmental protection.

The Millennium Declaration (2000), the Millennium Development Goals and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) offer us opportunities for effective management of the problems related to desertification and land degradation.

Very early, Algeria associated itself with multilateral efforts to negotiate

and consolidate the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. She has brought in important measures aimed at fighting the effects of desertification and drought in arid and semi-arid areas within her own territory.

Major programmes, based on an appropriate institutional framework and covering 20 million hectares, have been put in place to combat desertification and land degradation, by using reforestation, rationalising use of grazing areas, raising awareness and mobilizing local authorities and citizens. The “green wall”, already covering an area of 300,000 hectares, will be expanded by 100,000 hectares by 2015.

And a new national map, based on remote sensing and creating awareness on desertification, has been developed to strengthen these efforts.

Moreover, the fight against desertification should also be combined with improved understanding of deserts, both as complete ecosystems and as specific sites for sustainable development, due to the natural resources and unique biodiversity they contain. Their value for human settlements and their invaluable cultural richness also demand such recognition.

Southern Algeria is home to two huge national parks in the midst of the Sahara at the Ahaggar and the Tassili. These open-air museums, part of world heritage, cover a total area of 452,000 square kilometers. An important project for preserving the biodiversity and cultural heritage is under way with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

It is increasingly essential to develop an integrated international strategy for the protection of our planet. In this precise case, the commitment of the international community should be up to the challenges that we are facing.



Shielding ecological security



ZHOU SHENGXIA

Minister,
Ministry of Environmental Protection,
People's Republic of China

The eco-system consisting of air, ocean, lakes, land, grassland and forest nourishes the Earth — our warm and beautiful home — and provides

The Chinese government developed “ten measures for environment and development” two months after the 1992 UN Conference on Environ-

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