

## Press Release

### Society for Conservation and Protection of Environment (SCOPE)



### **14 Organizations around the world joined hands together in fight against desertification--**

Today, on the United Nations' **World Day to Combat Desertification** - a day that highlights the fight against land degradation - 14 organisations from around the world are launching a joint initiative called **Drynet**. This EU-funded project aims to strengthen civil society networks, such as farmers' collectives, indigenous groups; women's organisations; trade unions and non-governmental organisations with the right knowledge and visibility to influence dryland development policies in affected countries.

#### **Land degradation and alternative strategies**

Desertification is simply the degradation of drylands, arid regions such as deserts; grasslands and savannahs, which currently cover over one third of the global land area. Close to one billion people directly depend upon dryland ecosystems and products for their livelihoods. Due to current climatic changes and destructive land use, land is degrading faster than ever. Developing countries bear the heaviest burden of this process, resulting in poverty and migration. In response local farmer organizations in many parts of the world have developed alternative land management strategies. Many of these approaches

have achieved notable success; however, they need to be revealed and brought to the attention of policy makers and other stakeholders.

### **Desertification and Pakistan**

Pakistan is predominantly a dry land country. Eighty percent of the land is arid and semi-arid, and therefore, vulnerable to desertification. Out of 79.6 million ha in the country, only about 20 million are suitable for agriculture (16 million for irrigated farming and 4 million for rain fed, or Barani, agriculture). About 4.2 million ha are forested, while a sizeable chunk (28 million ha) are rangelands.

The services provided by natural ecosystems in drylands are the foundation for the rural economy, supporting agriculture, livestock, forestry, water supply and non-renewable energy. About two-thirds of Pakistan's 152.53 million people depend on dry land areas for their livelihoods, largely through agro-pastoral activities, with a growth rate of about 2 percent per year, the population will almost double in the next 32 years. Already, estimates suggest, 55 percent of the rural population live on fragile lands that are prone to desertification, drought and floods. Population growth and existing poverty lead to an over-exploitation of resources (cutting of trees, removal of vegetation, over-grazing, over-use of water, etc), leading in turn to reduced productivity of land, food insecurity and further poverty.

Dry land areas of Baluchistan, Sindh, NWFP, and southern Punjab are faced with increasing desertification, primarily due to improper land use practices, over-shifting sand dunes, due to low recharge and over-exploitation of meager water resources. Irrigated areas are plagued with water logging, salinity reducing the drainage capacity of soils and consequently leading to loss of soil fertility, crop yields and biodiversity. Eleven million ha are affected by water logging and 3 million ha by salinity. Deforestation in the northern mountains is causing loss of biodiversity and carbon sequestration as well as soil erosion and increasing sedimentation of rivers, reservoirs and canals, thus greatly reducing critical ecosystem functions. The soils in this area have especially low infiltration rates and surface sealing as a result of heavy trampling by livestock has led to high runoff.

In the sandy desert of Thar (Sindh), Thal and Cholistan (Punjab) and Kharan (Baluchistan) soil erosion by wind is accentuated in drought years leading to loss of plant cover. This is further exacerbated from trampling by livestock. Furthermore, loose sand in Thal and Kharan gathers in up to 4m high sand dunes which are advancing on adjacent farm land.

Critical mangrove resources are severely threatened in the coastal areas of Baluchistan and Sindh. Destruction of these forests has had a devastating impact on inter-tidal marine life and is directly undermining the livelihoods of some 150,000 fisherman. Mangrove forests bind the soil, protecting rivers and

estuaries from siltation. They also act as important coastal shelter belts. Reduced freshwater and sediment flows as a result of ambitious upstream irrigation schemes have led to a decline in nutrient flows, sea water intrusion, and large-scale die-offs of mangroves. Reduced sediment flows have also led to coastal erosion. Over the past 20 years, freshwater flows to the Indus delta have been reduced from over 45 MAF to roughly 20 MAF.

Desertification in Pakistan is causing significant environmental problems, including soil erosion, loss of soil fertility and associated crop productivity, flash floods, sedimentation of water courses, and deforestation and the associated loss of carbon and biodiversity assets.

### **SCOPE's efforts**

SCOPE is involved in UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) since 1993. It has played a vital role in promoting UNCCD among NGOs around the world. SCOPE has initiated a programme against desertification in Sindh since 1997. It has been building small check dams and water reservoirs to catch and store rainwater in Sindh Kohistan region in Malir and Jamshoro district with the support of Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF). These reservoirs not only provide freshwater to poor communities but also recharge groundwater resources. In Mithi, Tharparkar, SCOPE has established an Anti-Drought and Desertification Centre, which is providing technical support to local pastoral communities and farmers on fighting against drought and desertification. This centre has launched various projects related to agro-forestry, water purification, water conservation, indigenous people and biodiversity.

### **Giving future to drylands**

By identifying, collecting, sharing and disseminating many more of these success stories, the 14 Drynet partners (from: Iran; Turkey; Pakistan; Bolivia; Brazil; Chile; Mauritania; South Africa; Senegal; Kazakhstan; India; the Netherlands, France; Germany) will strengthen national civil society networks in both knowledge and skills, making them important partners for policy makers in putting dryland and related poverty issues higher on the political agenda. Through newsletters, radio programmes and an interactive website, Drynet will stimulate and promote sustainable development. The ultimate goal is to provide key global stakeholders from science and policy makers with an urgently needed practical response to combat land degradation by linking local action to global opportunities.

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*Note for the editor:*

For more information about the 14 Drynet partners, please visit the project website: [www.dry-net.org](http://www.dry-net.org)

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*This project is funded by the EU*