



Healthy soils form the basis for our food production systems. Without healthy soils it is not possible to produce healthy food. Healthy soils also filter rainwater rendering it drinkable; they regulate climate by providing the largest carbon sinks and storing more carbon than all forests put together; and they sustain biodiversity as two-thirds of all known species live on land. Today, around one quarter of the world's total land area is affected by desertification, thus adversely impacting the lives and livelihoods of close to one sixth of the global population.

The United Nations observes 17th June as World Day to Combat Desertification. This year's theme is "An articulate and timely call to action to conserve soil and ensure the sustenance of a growing population".

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon commemorated the event today by stating "Land degradation and desertification undercut human rights, starting with the right to food. Nearly 1 billion people lack adequate nutrition, and those living off degraded areas are among the most affected. Their situation could worsen if land degradation, as projected, reduces global food production by 12 per cent by 2035."

“We”, Mr. Ban added, “degrade 12 million hectares of productive land every year - an area the size of Benin or Honduras. More than half our farmland is degraded, and only 10 per cent is improving. About 500 million hectares could be restored cost-effectively, rather than being abandoned. If we do not change how we use our land, we will have to convert an area the size of Norway into new farmland every year to meet future needs for food, freshwater, biofuels and urban growth. This would cause deforestation and other negative environmental impact.”

He concluded his address by reminding us that “Our lives and civilizations depend on the land.” and urged the world community to “invest in healthy soils to secure our rights to food and freshwater”.