



ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE: Topic 2

THE ISSUE OF INCREASING DESERTIFICATION

Background:

Desertification is defined by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as “land degradation in arid, semiarid and dry subhumid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities”¹. Land degradation has always happened throughout history, but the pace at which it occurs has accelerated, reaching 30 to 35 times the historical rate.

There are a number of causes that brought about this acceleration: urbanisation, mining, farming and ranching. All of these activities deplete nutrients in the soil, contribute to soil erosion, and make it harder for the land to retain water and for plants to regrow. It is estimated that by 2030, 50 million people could be displaced due to desertification.

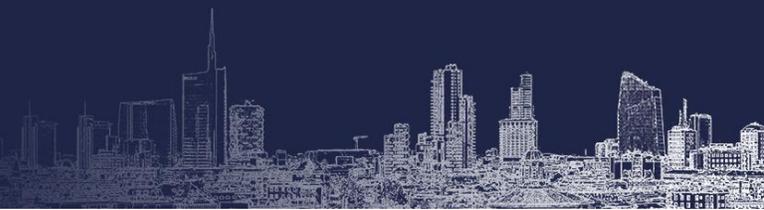
The risk of desertification is ubiquitous: in fact, every continent, apart from Antarctica, is affected by desertification. According to the European Commission's World Atlas of Desertification, more than 75 percent of the Earth's land area is already degraded, and more than 90 percent could become degraded by 2050. Every year 4.18 million square kilometers of soil are degraded annually; Africa and Asia are the most affected continents.

Useful terms:

- **UNCCD:** UN Convention to Combat Desertification.
- **Desertification:** land degradation in arid, semiarid and dry subhumid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities.
- **Soil degradation:** the decline in soil condition caused by its improper use or poor management, usually for agricultural, industrial or urban purposes.
- **Overgrazing:** the practice of grazing too many livestock for too long a period on land unable to recover its vegetation, or of grazing ruminants on land not suitable for grazing as a result of certain physical parameters such as its slope.
- **Resolution 44/172, 1989** Implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification.
- **Resolution 45/188, 1993** Establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

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https://www.un.org/en/events/desertification_decade/background.shtml#:~:text=Desertification%20refers%20to%20the%20land,climatic%20variations%20and%20human%20activities.



Important bloc positions:

There are two different blocs regarding this issue:

- Countries which believe that desertification is a global issue that can be resolved exclusively through global cooperation,
- Countries which believe that desertification is only a local problem that needs local solutions.

The countries may also be divided into:

- countries directly affected by desertification, including for example:
 - regions in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan surrounding the Aral sea (excessive use of water for agricultural purposes causes the sea to shrink, leaving behind a saline desert)
 - Africa’s Sahel region (population growth caused an increase in wood harvesting, illegal farming and land clearing for housing)
- countries at severe risk of being affected by desertification, including for example:
 - Mediterranean region (due to climate change will experience a drastic change)
- countries indirectly affected by desertification, including for example:
 - European Union (immigration and food system)
 - USA (immigration and food system)
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² <https://wp.nyu.edu/sustainability-nyusustainablog/2017/06/>



Possible solutions:

There are several innovation in the field of agriculture that can be introduced to limit desertification:

- Plan soil and water conservation through means such as:
 - Salt traps
 - Irrigation improvements
 - Cover crops
 - Crop rotation and rotational grazing
 - Terracing
 - Windbreaks
 - Dune stabilization
 - Charcoal conversion improvements
 - great green wall initiative

Research also plays an important role in reducing desertification:

- Promoting research and development in regards to desertification
- Predicting the effects of desertification on the economy and food production of affected countries, planning resolutions accordingly
- Limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees celsius by enacting all the measures necessary to reduce climate change

Further reading:

- <https://www.britannica.com/science/desertification>
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/desertification>
- <https://www.greenfacts.org/en/desertification/l-3/1-define-desertification.htm#0p0>
- <https://www.greenfacts.org/en/desertification/l-2/1-define-desertification.htm>
- <https://www.unccd.int/>
- https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/germanwatch.org/files/20-2-01e%20Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202020_13.pdf
- <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ca82356571bf4af6a99f9d80c23cbb46>

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- Nunez, Christina. “Desertification, explained”. National geographic
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/desertification>
- <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.355.aspx.pdf>
- <https://www.greenfacts.org/en/desertification/index.htm#1>
- Resolution 44/172, 1989 <http://www.un-documents.net/a44r172.htm>
- Resolution 45/188, 1993 https://treaties.un.org/doc/source/docs/A_RES_47_188-Eng.pdf