



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS
on the occasion of
WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION
17 June 2013**

“Don’t let our future dry up”

Water underpins all social and economic activity. Without water, food production would stop, cities cease to function, economic activity would halt and green forests turn to desert. As demand rises and competition for water increases, none of us can be assured uninterrupted access to water supplies; and the uses of water, including for agriculture, energy and health, are at risk. Climate change will affect water availability; in particular increasing the frequency and severity of droughts and increasing stresses where water is already limited, especially in drylands.

Pressure is increasing on dryland ecosystem provisions such as food, forage, fuel, building materials and water for humans and livestock through a combination of human and climatic factors. Droughts, especially when associated with desertification, can have serious impacts on biodiversity, putting further stress on ecosystem resilience. Although the biodiversity of drylands is adapted to water stress, it remains particularly vulnerable. At the same time, this biodiversity is vital for the livelihoods of millions of people, especially in Africa.

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its twenty Aichi Biodiversity Targets are founded on the indispensable contribution of biodiversity to sustainable development. Aichi Target 14 aims that by 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities and the poor and vulnerable. Aichi Target 15 seeks that by 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks have been enhanced, through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification.

World leaders at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) agreed to strive for a land degradation neutral world. Key to achieving this will be translating this goal into actionable targets at national, regional and international level. Key elements of action will include the conservation and sustainable use biodiversity and the restoration of ecosystems as highlighted in the Hyderabad Call for a Concerted Effort on Ecosystem Restoration.

To enhance synergies at the national level, and to support implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the ten-year Strategic Plan and Framework for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the secretariats of the UNCCD and the Convention on Biological Diversity



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(CBD) are collaborating in a Joint Work Plan that includes the development of guidance on water and land-use management, including adapted agricultural practices and the control of soil erosion. This aims to strengthen the capacity of Parties to the two conventions to manage ecosystems better, thereby contributing to the sustainable management of water.

Water is also a central theme in the discussions towards the sustainable development agenda post-2015 – reflecting how environmental sustainability is not only an important goal in itself, but a means for achieving most other objectives which are underpinned by biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Water is influenced heavily by ecosystems and the life associated with them. Forests, grasslands, soils and wetlands all influence the water cycle. These functions of ecosystems operate at local, regional and global scales and offer us opportunities to consider them as “natural water infrastructure” to be used in ways to achieve the same objectives as hard engineered infrastructure such as dams, pipelines, water treatment plants, irrigation systems, drainage networks and flood management embankments. There is increasing demonstration that natural infrastructure solutions work and offer cost-effective and sustainable solutions. For example, use of forests and other natural land cover to reduce erosion and increase the infiltration of rainfall; wetlands to store water during drought; rehabilitating soil biodiversity to deliver improved water availability for crops and hence improved food security; and landscape scale approaches that help reduce water risks in drylands by restoring natural water cycling in catchments. The booklet prepared for the International Day for Biological Diversity under the Theme ‘Water and Biodiversity’ can be found at <http://www.cbd.int/idb/doc/2013/booklet/idb-2013-booklet-en.pdf>

These and other natural infrastructure solutions are already used and incorporated into many modern water management strategies. But there is substantial opportunity to mainstream and upscale the approach. Natural infrastructure can play a vital role in increasing resilience to disasters and its degradation is often a primary cause of disasters in the first place.

During this International Year of Water Cooperation, and as we celebrate the World Day to Combat Desertification under the slogan “Don’t let our future dry up”, let us drive for sustainable strategies that integrate the management of land, water and biodiversity to meet human needs through sustaining ecosystem services and thereby combating desertification and achieving sustainable livelihoods in drylands. In this way we can demonstrate how implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity can contribute to achieving the objectives of the three Rio conventions, through synergies working towards sustainable development.
