



Living in harmony with nature

## Dry and Sub-Humid Lands

Dry and sub-humid lands cover about 47% of the Earth's terrestrial area. They include arid and semi-arid regions, grasslands, savannahs and Mediterranean landscapes. These fragile environments, home to many endemic species, warrant priority attention to avoid irreversible loss of biodiversity.

The biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands is well adapted to the harsh conditions typified by inconsistent rainfall patterns leading to periods of drought and floods, and, in many cases, high temperatures. Dry and sub-humid lands are the origin of many of the world's crops such as wheat, barley and olives. This biodiversity forms the basis of many livelihoods locally, and supports a large population of the world's food production.

The main pressures on biodiversity in dry and sub-humid lands are habitat conversion (for agriculture, transport, tourism and industry), as well as poor soil and water management. Climate change has a particularly strong impact on wetlands in drylands, grasslands, Mediterranean forests and desert margins. Invasive alien species adversely affect indigenous biodiversity. Excessive collection of fuel wood, over-harvesting of plants, over-hunting of wildlife and unsustainable agricultural practices all add to the problem.

The conservation and sustainable use of dry and sub-humid lands biodiversity is essential to livelihood development and poverty reduction as the majority of dryland areas are found in developing countries. Furthermore, as a result of the high proportion of indigenous peoples and local communities who are responsible for managing biodiversity resources in dry and sub-humid lands, these areas hold a great deal of opportunity for the engagement of communities in implementation of the Convention. Unfortunately, the link between biodiversity and poverty alleviation is not often reflected in poverty reduction or development planning.

The Convention on Biological Diversity has a programme of work on dry and sub-humid lands, which seeks to fill gaps in our knowledge, supports best management practices, and promotes partnerships among countries, institutions and other conventions.



Convention on  
Biological Diversity

[www.cbd.int/drylands](http://www.cbd.int/drylands)



## Fast Facts

- ▶ Dry and sub-humid lands are home to about two billion people (35% of the global population)
- ▶ Encompass approximately 44% of the world's cultivated systems
- ▶ 90% of people inhabiting dry and sub-humid lands live in developing countries
- ▶ Six countries (Botswana, Burkina Faso, Iraq, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova and Turkmenistan) have at least 99% of their area classified as dry and sub-humid lands
- ▶ Because of harsh conditions (irregular rainfall, high temperatures, etc.), many species have developed unique adaptations:
  - ▶ Desert toads lie dormant below the sand for months until the rain returns
- ▶ The sociable weaver of southern Africa builds communal nests weighing up to 1,000 kg to maximize insulation from extreme temperatures
- ▶ The Gemsbok of the Kalahari Desert can survive for weeks without water
- ▶ Dry and sub-humid lands include important areas of extraordinary endemism, such as the Mediterranean Basin, home to more than 11,700 endemic plant species
- ▶ Some 2,311 known dry and sub-humid lands species are endangered or threatened with extinction

## Learn More

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Drylands Development Centre

▶ [www.undp.org/drylands](http://www.undp.org/drylands)

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) ▶ [www.unccd.int](http://www.unccd.int)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) ▶ [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

▶ [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) ▶ [www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) ▶ <http://unfccc.int>

World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) ▶ [www.unep-wcmc.org](http://www.unep-wcmc.org)

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