



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Expert Group Meeting on Mobilizing the Young People to Combat Desertification and Drought

UN-House, Beirut, Lebanon, Thursday 23 June 2022

INFORMATION NOTE

I. Background

Human-induced changes to land cover have been contributing to global desertification and drought. According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), 70 percent of ice-free land has been altered, impacting over 3.2 billion people. If current trends continue, 90 percent of land will be affected by 2050¹.

Global efforts are being exerted to halt and reverse land degradation and restore degraded ecosystems, including through launching the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030)², and through commitments to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)³. For these global efforts to be fruitful, they need to consider the critical and needed support of young people. UNCCD estimates that 85 percent of the world's young people live in regions that are directly dependent on land and natural resources for sustenance. Restoration activities, such as the LDN, incorporate creating green jobs, enhancing resilience of affected people, and expanding development opportunities for a dignified life of future young generations.

More than 90% of land in the region is classified as arid or hyper-arid with very limited rainfall⁴. Within the already arid Arab region, desertification and drought are being aggravated further by climate change. When adding the unsustainable economic activities, the misuse of natural resources, the rapid urbanization, and the various geopolitical conflicts, the scenario gets even worse. The economic cost of land degradation in the Arab region has been estimated at \$9 billion per year⁵.

In the Arab region, adolescents, and youth, between 10 and 24 years old, represent more than a quarter of the total population⁶. Therefore, to address desertification and drought in the region, there is a clear need to get young people involved and be part of the solution. Nevertheless, several barriers prevent youth engagement, including limited awareness, lack of skills, financial and gender barriers, in addition to increased rates of rural-urban migration and urbanization.

Therefore, supporting young people engagement is essential, and can be done through fostering capacity building, building strategic partnerships, and promoting youth-led initiatives.

¹ <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/land-degradation-neutrality/overview>

² The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) is a joint UNEP-FAO initiative. It aims to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. It can help to end poverty, combat climate change and will only succeed if everyone plays a part.

³ The LDN concept emerged from the Rio+20 conference in 2012, achieving it requires avoiding new degradation of land; reducing existing degradation; and increasing efforts to restore lands to a natural or more productive state.

⁴ https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/desertification-drought-day-2020-food-feed-fibre-english_0.pdf

⁵ ASDR 2020 <https://asdr.unescwa.org/sdgs/pdf/en/ASDR2020-SDGs/ASDR2020-SDG15.pdf>

⁶ <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>

II. Objectives

ESCWA is organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) to raise awareness of the young people in the region on the impact of desertification and drought on their lives and future, and to highlight the roles they can play in tackling these two challenges in the Arab region. The meeting will discuss processes needed to mobilize young people and foster their engagement in addressing desertification and drought at regional, national and subnational levels. The meeting will be guided by the experiences of stakeholders from the public and private sectors, academia, and civil society. Together with experts, young activists and entrepreneurs will share their insights, and success stories. Networking between youth and experts will also be encouraged throughout the day.

A session of the meeting will be dedicated to commemorating the 2022 Desertification and Drought Day (DDD), which is celebrated each year on June 17th. The theme of this year's DDD is on "Rising up from drought together". The event will feature the winners of a youth [challenge on combating desertification and drought](#)⁷, which incentivized them to produce a video demonstrating solutions to address desertification and drought in the Arab region.

III. Thematic Areas

Status and impact of desertification and drought in the Arab region

Experts from the Arab region will present an overview of current trends of desertification and drought in the region and their immediate and long-term socio-economic impacts, particularly on young people and future generations. Moreover, attention will be given to current practices of young people that contribute directly or indirectly to land degradation and drought, solutions to mitigate their effects will also be discussed.

Success stories in the Arab States

Experts, Arab youth organizations, and activists will share their successful initiatives addressing desertification and drought, and how they can be replicated in other Arab countries. Focus will be given to creating green jobs and to involving young people in related national development plans.

Mobilizing young people: opportunities for advancing progress on desertification and drought

Experts will discuss the best ways of engaging the youth in designing and implementing strategies for combating desertification and drought. Attention will be given to implementation tools required to foster youth's contribution, such as capacity building, financing, and networking. The meeting will shed light on the advantages of having horizontal integration among the different ministries of concern, such as ministries of youth, education, higher education, and environment to have a comprehensive plan for youth involvement.

A special session: commemoration of the 2022 Desertification and Drought Day (DDD)

The meeting will offer an avenue for showcasing videos, prepared by youth in the region, on solutions to combat desertification and drought. The videos were produced for the ESCWA youth challenge that aimed to mark the 2022 Drought and Desertification Day and raise awareness among youth. Winners of the challenge will be announced and celebrated.

⁷ ESCWA is partnering with OICT, ACSAD and AOAD to challenge the creativity of Arab youth once again this year.

IV. Organizational issues

A. Participants

The expert group meeting will gather experts, practitioners, academia, and youth organizations engaged in desertification and drought-related issues in the Arab region.

B. Date and venue

The meeting will be held at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon on Thursday, 23 June 2022. Registration will commence at 9:00 a.m., and the meeting will conclude by 16:00. Participants are kindly asked to bring photographic identification and to arrive ahead of time, considering the time needed to pass through security check and collect their identification badge at the main entrance of the United Nations House. Access to the House is provided through Gibran Khalil Gibran Garden pedestrian entrance. Please note that the meeting will also be broadcasted on ESCWA's YouTube channel for interested people to attend remotely.

C. Language

The meeting will be conducted in Arabic.

D. Registration

Invited participants are kindly asked to fill out and return the registration form with a scanned colored photograph (passport size) and a scanned colored photocopy of their national passports to ESCWA no later than May 18, 2022. ESCWA will arrange a roundtrip air travel, a daily subsistence allowance and terminal expenses refunds for sponsored participants. Roundtrip airline tickets will be issued in economy class on the least expensive route, in accordance with United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations.

All participants are responsible for obtaining their own entry visa for travel to Lebanon, making their own hotel reservation and providing proof of COVID-19 vaccination or hold PCR negative test, as required by the Lebanese authorities.

E. Correspondence

Queries related to the meeting should be directed to the following:

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