



World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought

“Land belongs to the future, let’s climate proof it!”

On June 17, countries around the world will observe World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (WDCDD) under the theme *“land belongs to the future, let’s climate proof it!”* It is an annual observance to raise awareness of the pervasive problem of drought and desert formation and to highlight the urgent need to curb it. Further, observances aim to increase visibility of the drylands issue on the international environmental agenda.

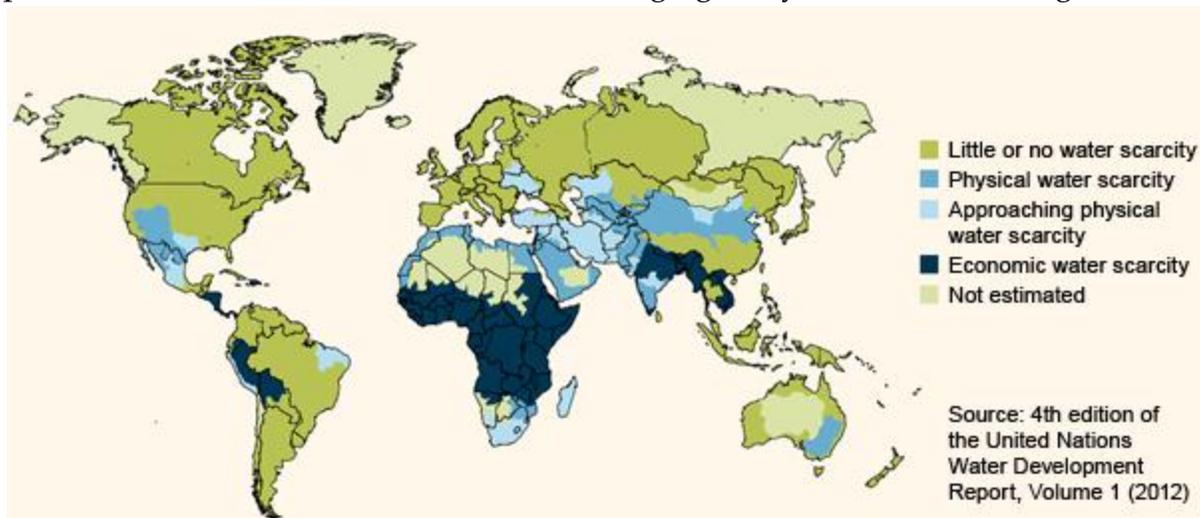
“Land is the basis of all life on earth and the source of livelihood for over 2 billion people. But every year, over 12 million productive hectares are transformed into wasteland through desertification and drought alone, either we take the measures needed to enhance resilience and enable land- dependent communities to adapt or we prepare for the political consequences of our inaction. The choice is our and 2014 is the year we are calling on every country to do its part”

UNCCD Executive Secretary

It may seem irrelevant to highlight drought and desertification in our hemisphere, but the realities of climate change and the threat of sea-level rise, are changing the dynamics of available land and making these issues increasingly pertinent. Desertification in our context is not abstract; the process is gradual and one which we need to be mindful of, given our emergent extractive sector. After all, “Soil formation takes many years, but just one flood can sweep it all away. Erosion is costing each of us more than 3 tons of fertile soil per year - at least 24 billion tons of soil is eroded a year”. (*Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification*)

Drought is a real effect of climate change which is impacting many parts of the world. As such, the world needs to be mindful of how it uses water to ensure that this resource continues to be maintained at levels to meet our needs especially for food production and health. While we enjoy an abundance of water and land in our country, we join the rest of the world in recognizing the global importance of these resources and raise our voice in solidarity as we observe this year's theme *"land belongs to the future, let's climate proof it!"*

Climate Change is not only threatening our health, food security and the amount of productive land available to us; it's also damaging ecosystems and affecting the services



they provide, hence, weakening the very basis of our existence. As the world moves towards combating hunger and poverty, lands are an integral part of the fight against hunger.

The climate of the planet has changed over the course of time. We are already seeing the effects of climate change on the weather patterns in Guyana, prolonged and unscheduled rainfall, rising sea levels are a clear indication that we need to take action.

Land degradation is a threat to plant and animal species and ultimately our survival; it also significantly decreases the amount of the healthy land and its' associated services. Here in Guyana, steps continue to be taken towards Sustainable Land Management. Our National Action Programme to Combat Land Degradation (2006) calls for increased capacity (skills, knowledge and technology) to combat land degradation. Also, a Capacity Development and Mainstreaming for Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Project, implemented under UNDP-GEF by the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission resulted in several studies to assess and inform us on SLM practices and their effect in our country. Through this Project, many practitioners were trained in relevant land use

assessment techniques among other areas and teachers were made more aware of SLM; a 'Teachers' SLM Kit designed to aid teachers in integrating SLM issues in lessons was also produced. Guyana is also making good progress towards a National Land Use Plan intended to curb the unsustainable land use practices.

Meanwhile, as citizens of this wonderful land and especially those involved in large developmental activities, we should be ever conscious that our activities do not significantly impact the land. As such, we must make sure that we obtain approval from all the relevant authorities before we commence operations. Approvals are usually given with conditions that ensure that our operations put measures in place to reduce any negative impacts on the land.

Share your ideas and questions by sending letters to: "Our Earth, Our Environment", C/o EIT Division, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia, Georgetown; or email us at eit.epaguyana@gmail.com.