

## Sri Lanka in the UNCCD context

By

**K.A.I.D. Silva**, Director (Land Resources)

**Madhawa Ranasinghe**, Development Officer (Forest Resources)

**Manori Karunarathna**, Development Officer (Land Resources)

World leaders from more than 185 countries gathered in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 at the famous Earth Summit to discuss the underline causes for ever increasing environment problems experiencing worldwide. Those leaders clearly recognized that there is a conflict between current development processes and the environment in almost every country.

In the Earth Summit the Brundtland Commission reported that the current rapid development face of the world has a very negative impact on natural resources and utilization by people for their current development needs and thereby exceed limits of carrying capacity of those natural resources extraction and utilization. They also discussed intertemporal and intergeneration equity of Natural Resource availability.

As a result at the Earth Summit in 1992 reported the concept of Sustainable Development. At the same time the Earth Summit gave breath to very important Global Conventions namely Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and United Nations Convention on Combat Desertification (UNCCD). **Land degradation**

Reduction or loss, in Arid, Semi-Arid and Dry Sub-Humid areas, of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of. rainfed cropland, irrigated cropland, or range, pasture forest and woodlands resulting from land

### Desertification

Desertification refers to Land Degradation in Arid, Semi-Arid and Sub-Humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities.

The UNCCD deals with spread of Desertification and Land Degradation taking place worldwide.

Desertification and Land Degradation has drawn a special attention of the world at the Earth Summit and it was identified as one of the major challenges and hindrance for Sustainable Development. The UNCCD came in to effect in 1994 to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation of the UNCCD

### Desertification

Desertification refers to Land Degradation in Arid, Semi-Arid and Sub-Humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities

### Land degradation

Reduction or loss, in Arid, Semi-Arid and Dry Sub-Humid areas, of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of. rainfed cropland, irrigated cropland, or range, pasture forest and woodlands resulting from land

As experiencing in many countries, Land Degradation also has been a serious problem in Sri Lanka since past few decades. It shows only a little recovery despite of many endeavours and initiatives taken by the Government. Land Degradation is aggravating day by day due to number of anthropogenic reasons such as land clearance for human settlements, agricultural development projects, land alienation programs etc. Though this is comparably somewhat slow in dry zone of Sri Lanka, Land Degradation is severe in Intermediate and up country areas of the country.

Land Degradation in the face of loss of productivity due to depletion of soil fertility, loosing of chemical and physical properties of the soil, soil pollution due to various pollutants etc. Soil Salinity, Alkalinity, Iron Toxicity creates problem soils both



in Dry and Wet zones Sri Lanka as well. These conditions greatly also greatly lead to soil / Land Degradation. High ambient temperature due to Global Warming and Climate Change also aggravates and influence Land Degradation.

Considering facts and trends above Land Degradation, Sri Lanka signed and ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation (UNCCD) in 1995 and became a party to the convention. Ever since, Sri Lanka closely works with the UNCCD and the Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment has been the National Focal Point (NFP) for the UNCCD.

UNCCD Secretariat facilitates the cooperation between developed and developing countries particularly on knowledge and technology transfer towards Sustainable Land Management (SLM). The UNCCD also has close links with the other two Rio Conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and currently above three convention have identified the synergies among them and engage in a synergistic approach to implement these three conventions for better results.

**Source:**

<http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Rio+20/Land%20degradation%20neutrality%202015/LDNFlyer.pdf>

The UNCCD has developed a 10 year Implementation Strategy and requested all country parties to prepare their own National Action Programme (NAPs) to act locally. Accordingly, several Asia and Pacific countries have prepared NAPs appropriately and they are in the process of mainstreaming those NAPs into their Sustainable Development Policy Frameworks in order to ensure effective implementation.

Sri Lanka working closely with the UNCCD prepared its first National Action Programme (NAP) in the year 2002 with the objective of combating Land Degradation and mitigating impacts of droughts in the country. This has been revised and aligned with the UNCCD 10- year strategy (2008-2018) and guidelines in the year 2010 by the Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment according to the UNCCD Decision 2/ COP 9 and this will be implemented during the period (2015-2024).

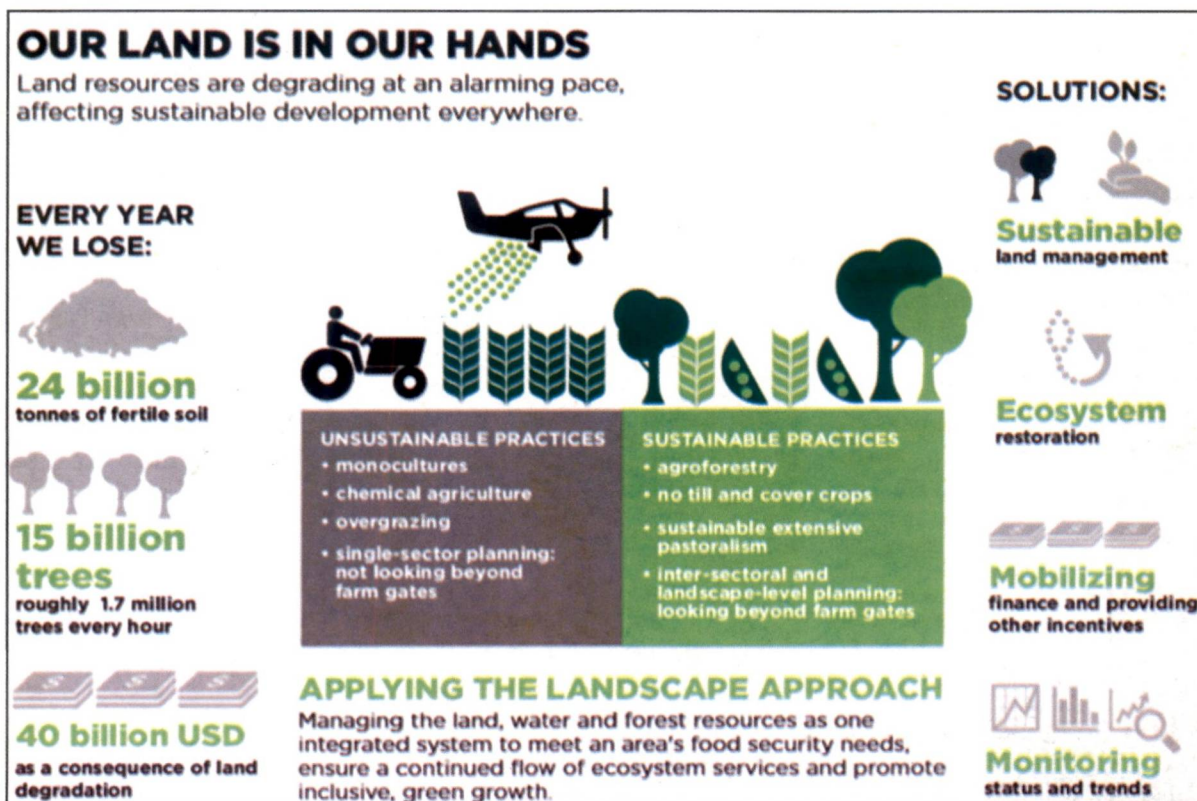


Figure 1 - Current major negative impacts of land degradation and solutions for addressed the Combating land degradation.

- **The NAP has following Strategic Objectives such as:**  
 To improve the living conditions of affected people  
 To improve the conditions of affected ecosystems,  
 To generate global benefits  
 To mobilize resources to support implementation of the convention.
- **Also the NAP has following five Operational Objectives such as:**  
 Raise awareness and education,  
 Improve advocacy and policy frame work,  
 Science, technology and knowledge Capacity building  
 Financing and technology transfer.

In Sri Lanka's revised National Action Programme (NAP) for has identified major issues in combating Land Degradation and formulated solutions for those issues under 25 major programs. This NAP is implemented through number of different stakeholding organizations / agencies. Therefore, the NAP can be considered as a comprehensive plan of action as well as a better tool to minimize Land Degradation and to mitigate the adverse effects of Land Degradation.

The UN has declared June 17<sup>th</sup> as World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) in the year 1995. WDCD has observed since 1995. Since then, country parties to the UNCCD, organizations of the United Nations (UN), non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders commemorate this international day in every year on 17 June with the various type of outreach activities.

This year's World Day to Combat Desertification emphasise the importance of inclusive cooperation to restore and rehabilitate degraded land and contribute towards achieving the overall Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The global observance event of this year will be held on 17<sup>th</sup> June in Beijing, China hosted by the State Forestry Administration of China (SFA)

As a NFP of Sri Lanka Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment is planning several

programmes in selected areas of the country to commemorate the World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) in this year under the theme of **“Inclusive cooperation for achieving Land Degradation Neutrality”**. Further, to achieve the target of land degradation neutrality through highlighting the **“Protect earth. Restore land and Engage people”** by addressing more comprehensive participation and cooperatively working with global people.

According to the Sustainable Development Priorities those have been spelt out under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), **the Goal number 15 discuss about Life on Earth and its strategy number 15.3.** emphasizes: *By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world*

**The SDG - 15 also sets out a new global ambition: to achieve a Land Degradation Neutral World by the year 2030.**

SDG Goal number 15 deals with Life on Earth. Furthermore, it elaborate the need of: *Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss*

As the national focal point of the UNCCD, the Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment plans to launch a comprehensive programme to commemorate the World Environment Day together with World Day to Combat Desertification in this year. Accordingly, in this year, many programs have been chosen to be implemented in Matale District in collaboration with all affiliated institutions of the Ministry as well as with other stekeholding agencies such as Natural Resource Management Centre (NRMC) and Land Use Policy Planning Department (LUPPD).

**Reference**

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>  
<https://www.unccd.int/en/Pages/default.aspx>