

**Working together towards land degradation neutrality for more resilient dryland forests,
landscapes and livelihoods - A Call for Action for Dryland Forests**

**Wednesday, 7 May 2025
7 May 2025, 1:15-2:30 pm EDT**

Trusteeship Council, UN Headquarters, New York

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[Livestreamed on UN WEBTV](#) (tbc)

Title: Working together towards land degradation neutrality for more resilient dryland forest
landscapes and livelihoods

Subtitle: A Call for Action for Dryland Forests

Panel:

- **Opening remarks:** Dr Khaled Alabdulkader, Chief Executive Officer, the National Center for Vegetation Cover and Combating Desertification (NCVC)
- Panel:
 - **Fritjof Boerstler**, Global Coordinator of the GEF-7 Impact Programs, FAO Headquarters
 - **IUCN** [tbc]
 - **Ndapanda Kanime**, Senior Programme Officer, Directorate of Food Agriculture and Resources, Southern African Development Community (SADC)
 - **Rahma Jrais**, from King Khalid University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [tbc]
- **Closing remarks:** Minoru Takada, Deputy Director, UN Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS) Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations
- **Moderator:** Ms Malgorzata Buszko-Briggs, Team Leader, Global Process and Governing Bodies, Secretary of the Committee on Forestry, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Background

The 20th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF20) presents a pivotal opportunity to tackle the critical issues surrounding land degradation, particularly in dryland areas, which cover

about 41% of the Earth's land surface and are home to approximately 2.5 billion people, about 25 percent of the global population. Over 50 percent of these populations rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, primarily producing staples like millet, sorghum, and various pulses. However, agricultural productivity in drylands is hindered by challenges such as low soil fertility, high evaporation rates, and erratic rainfall patterns. The competition for limited land resources between agricultural and forestry sectors further complicates this issue, often leading to conflicts over land use priorities.

In December 2024, during the UNCCD COP16, the Bureau of UNFF20, in response to a proposal from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, decided that “dryland forests” would be discussed under the agenda item of “emerging issues.” This decision aligns with the findings from the side event titled “Significance of Dryland Forests for Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality, Combating Biodiversity Loss and Climate Change,” which underscored the significant socio-economic and environmental roles of dryland forests. According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), around 1.5 billion hectares of drylands are at risk of desertification due to unsustainable agricultural practices. Additionally, drylands contain 1.1 billion hectares of forests, representing 27 percent of the world’s forest area. The biodiversity of drylands, characterized by species highly specialized to extreme conditions, serves as the foundation for diverse livelihoods and essential ecosystem services.

The agricultural expansion, including both crop production and livestock grazing, is responsible for approximately 70 percent of dryland deforestation, thereby threatening unique ecosystems and leading to habitat loss that significantly impacts biodiversity. In addition, gender disparities in access to land and resources perpetuate inequalities, affecting the overall effectiveness of land management strategies. Given the urgent need to address these issues, the forthcoming discussions at UNFF20 will underscore the importance of sustainable management practices that balance agricultural expansion with forestry management.

UNFF20 aims to promote the sustainable management of all types of forests, enhance the contribution of forests to sustainable development, and strengthen their role in combating climate change. It also aligns with the UN's strategic framework for global forest goals, including the objective of increasing the forest area by three percent worldwide by 2030. The recent side event at the UNCCD COP16 highlighted the necessity for cooperation between UNFF, UNCCD, UNFCCC, and UNCBD to support countries in protecting and sustainably managing dryland forests. By focusing on these objectives, UNFF20 will be instrumental in fostering collaboration and innovative solutions to ensure the resilience of dryland ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. Efforts during UNFF20 will also aim to address the challenges posed by unsustainable practices, land-use changes, and climate stresses such as droughts and desertification. The conference will provide a platform for sharing best practices and making concrete suggestions for the protection, conservation, and sustainable management of dryland forests, ultimately contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and enhancing environmental integrity.

Objectives:

- Raise awareness on efforts being made at global, regional and national level to address challenges that dryland forest landscapes face.
- Provide an opportunity for dialogue and exchange with the UNFF Members to consider the importance of dryland forests and leveraging opportunities with regards to on-going interventions.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased awareness of
 - (i) the significance of dryland forests in achieving multiple environmental and socio-economic goals working towards land degradation neutrality.
 - (ii) exemplified leveraging opportunities with regards to on-going initiatives, including knowledge hubs and good practices at global, regional and national level.

Agenda:

Moderator: **Malgorzata Buszko-Briggs**, Team Leader, Global Process and Governing Bodies, Secretary of the Committee on Forestry, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Time	Item	Speaker
1:00-1:15		Panelists will arrive and be seated on podium (first session) and in reserved seats in the first row (second and award session)
1:15-1:20	Welcome and setting the scene	Moderator: Malgorzata Buszko-Briggs , Team Leader, Global Process and Governing Bodies, Secretary of the Committee on Forestry, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
1:20-1:25	Opening statement	Khaled Alabdulkader , Chief Executive Officer, the National Center for Vegetation Cover and Combating Desertification (NCVC), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
1:25-1:28	Video	Produced by the National Center for Vegetation Cover and Combating Desertification (NCVC), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

1:30-1:55	Working together for dryland forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fritjof Boerstler, Global Coordinator of the GEF-7 Impact Programs, FAO Headquarters • IUCN (tbc) • Ndapanda Kanime, Senior Programme Officer, Directorate of Food Agriculture and Resources, Southern African Development Community (SADC)
1:55-2:05	National perspective on challenges and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amal Daej Aldaej, International Relations Advisor, National Center for Vegetation Cover and Combating Desertification (NCVC) • Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
2:05-2:20	Harvesting country perspectives from the floor (open segment)	
2:20-2:30	Looking ahead (closing remarks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minoru Takada, Deputy Director, UN Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS) Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations • Moderator: Malgorzata Buszko-Briggs, Team Leader, Global Process and Governing Bodies, Secretary of the Committee on Forestry, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)