



Venue
University of Bern, UniS, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, 3012 Bern, Room A 003

Organizers
University of Bern
Centre for Development and Environment (CDE)
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Swiss Agency for Development and
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Land matters! Ignoring land and soil issues at our peril

An event highlighting efforts by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and Switzerland's political, scientific, and financial engagement

Keynote address by Monique Barbut, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of UNCCD

Tuesday, 15 April 2014

18:15 – 20:00

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Background

In 1992, the Rio Earth Summit identified the greatest challenges to sustainable development: desertification, climate change, and biodiversity loss. Two years later, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was set up. UNCCD focuses on drylands – arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas home to some of the world's most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples. In its 10-year strategy (2008–2018), UNCCD states its aim of forging “a global partnership to reverse and prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability”. UNCCD is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.

The 195 Parties to the Convention work together to improve the living conditions for people in drylands, maintain and restore land and soil productivity, and mitigate the effects of drought. As the dynamics of land, climate, and biodiversity are intimately connected, UNCCD collaborates closely with the other two Rio Conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to meet these complex challenges with an integrated approach and the best possible use of natural resources.

Switzerland supports UNCCD's mission with about CHF 50 million a year for over 70 development projects and programmes that target problems specific to drylands. Numerous projects are designed to preserve water and fertile land by means of sustainable agricultural production and forest management. These efforts are invested with a long-term perspective and implemented in some of the poorest countries in Africa and Asia such as Niger, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Mongolia, and Kyrgyzstan, all of which suffer from repeated and severe drought spells and are prone to desertification. Environmental protection has a direct impact on food security and poverty reduction, and lasting improvements in living conditions are only possible if we preserve the environment by using natural resources in an efficient and sustainable manner. The costs of inaction are much higher than those of concerted, effective prevention, and Switzerland is actively committed to implementing sustainable use of natural resources.

The University of Bern's Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) works with UNCCD to report best practices in sustainable land management. In addition, CDE implements research programmes on sustainable land management and hosts WOCAT (World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies; www.wocat.net), a global network of soil and water conservation specialists, dedicated to sustainable land management.

Monique Barbut, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of UNCCD, will deliver a keynote address highlighting why land matters in the post-2015 development framework, and the implications of ignoring land and soil issues.

Programme

- 18:15** **Welcome address by University of Bern**
Silvio Decurtins, Dean of Faculty of Science, University of Bern
- 18:20** **Welcome address by SDC**
Pio Wennubst, Assistant Director-General and Head of Global Cooperation, SDC
- 18:25** **CDE's research activities on sustainable land management**
Gudrun Schwilch, Head of Natural Resources and Ecosystem Services Cluster, CDE, University of Bern
- 18:35** **Screening of video trailer “Drought and disaster: building resilience – people with greener land”**
Video commented by Hanspeter Liniger, Director of WOCAT, CDE, University of Bern
- 18:45** **Why land matters in the post-2015 development framework**
Keynote address by Monique Barbut, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of UNCCD
- 19:15** **Switzerland's engagement to combat desertification**
Yves Guinand, UNCCD Focal Point of Switzerland, SDC
- 19:25** **Expert contributions on biodiversity and climate change**
Speakers to be confirmed
- 19:35** **Discussion and questions**
- 19:45** **Refreshments (“apéro riche”)**

This is a public event and participation is free of charge.