



17 June 2014 – Desertification is a phenomenon most people haven't heard of, or don't understand. Yet it ranks among the greatest environmental challenges of our time.

Although desertification can include the encroachment of sand dunes on land, it doesn't refer to the advance of deserts. Rather, it is the persistent degradation of dryland ecosystems by human activities — including unsustainable farming, mining, overgrazing and clear-cutting of land — and by climate change.

Desertification is a global issue and affects humanity as a whole. 2.6 billion people depend directly on agriculture, but 52% of the land used for agriculture is moderately or severely affected by soil degradation.

Due to drought and desertification, each year 12 million hectares are lost - 23 hectares a minute – which is the equivalent of 32 football fields a minute, lost to desertification.

These vanished “football fields” represent a possible 20 million tons of grain that could have been grown there in one year. While cheering for the World Cup players, we're endangering our population and our own food supply.

Some two billion people depend on ecosystems in dry land areas, 90% of whom live in developing countries. Many underdeveloped countries, where overpopulation causes pressure to exploit drylands for farming, are experiencing a combination of greater need for food and less land available to harvest it from. These marginally productive regions are overgrazed, the land is exhausted and groundwater is over-drafted.

We mark today the [World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought](#), whose central theme this year is to increase awareness about the potential of ecosystem-based adaptation as a strategy for coping with the impacts of climate change, especially in the drylands. This means protecting our environment, our ecosystems, and ensuring they are healthy in order to reduce their vulnerability to climate change. This will in turn protect us, the people, from the possibly devastating consequences destroying 32 football fields a minute everyday will have.

“Globally, unpredictable and extreme weather is predicted to have an even greater impact on food production. With world population rising, it is urgent that we work to build the resilience of all productive land resources and the communities that depend on them. We need to manage the land sustainably, avoid further degradation, and reclaim and repair that which has been damaged.” This warning and call to action was delivered by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in [his statement](#) marking 2014’s observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification.