

U.N. MEETING ON DESERTIFICATION ENDS WITH VOW TO CURB LAND DEGRADATION

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

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A two-week long United Nations-led Conference to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) ended with a commitment to achieve land degradation neutrality by 2030. Such neutrality is defined by the U.N. as ensuring that enough land is available across the world to ensure a sustainable future.

The Delhi Declaration, a consensus document, agreed upon by more than 100 countries “welcomed” the proposed adoption of a “voluntary” land degradation neutrality target by India, which has committed to restoring at least 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. The Declaration doesn’t detail commitments by other countries.

Almost 122 nations, including India, have made voluntary commitments in previous years to ensure that a certain percentage of their degraded land was restored. India had agreed, again on a voluntary basis, to restore 20 million hectares by 2020. Nearly 96 million hectares of land is deemed ‘degraded’ in India.

On August 14th, 2018, India claimed it had brought an area of 9.8 million hectares under restoration since 2011. Of the 9.8 million hectares, 94.4% was contributed by government agencies, while NGOs and private companies contributed 3.6% and 2% respectively.

Countries will address insecurity of land tenure, promote land restoration to reduce land-related carbon emissions and mobilise innovative sources of finance from public and private sources, the UN said in a statement.

“To my mind, this was the conference where we put people at the heart of what we do,” said Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, “We have woken up to the fact that we will see more frequent and severe droughts, a phenomenon that will be exacerbated by climate change,” he added.

Independent organisations said India must outline specific action plans to arrest land degradation.

“There ought to be clear estimates of the extent of degraded areas across various ecosystems and land use is required to assess the efficacy of ongoing reclamation programmes, to give successful policy prescriptions and to get an accurate picture of the actual costs of land degradation,” The Energy and Resources Institute, said in a statement. “Separate atlases and policies for grasslands and wetlands of India are clearly warranted,” it said.

The UNCCD is the only legally binding international agreement on land issues. Its 196 parties aim, through partnerships, to implement the Convention and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The meet drew almost 9,000 participants and saw ministers and heads of UN and other inter-governmental bodies attend several events around the conference.

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