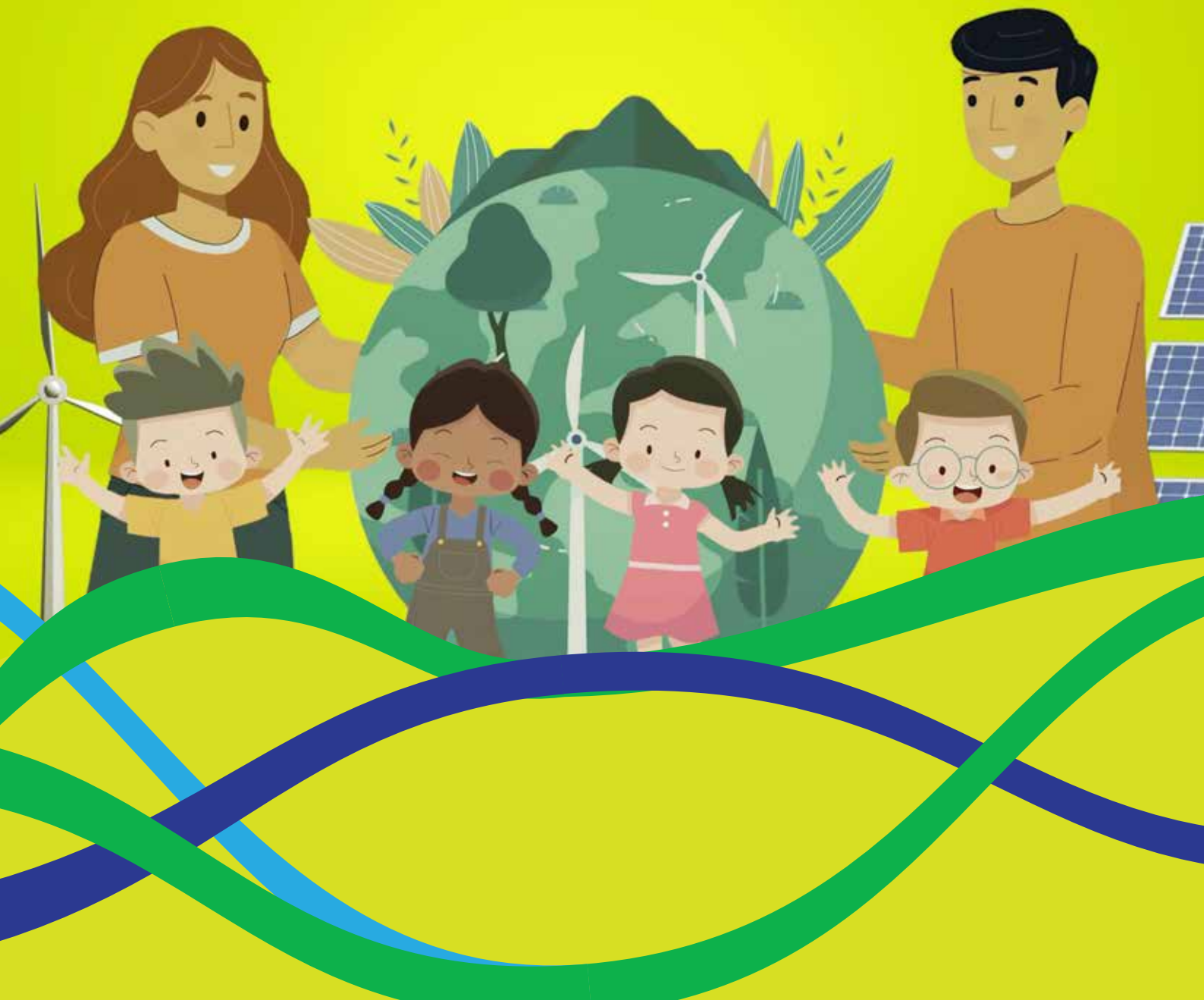


# Faith in Land, Faith in our Children's Future

**Using Our Power as Bank Clients  
to Combat Desertification**



Life on Earth is not possible without healthy, sustainable, and productive land. Our ability to survive in many areas of the world is being threatened by desertification. Between 2015 and 2019 alone, 100 million hectares of land were degraded every year, with 15 countries severely affected by drought.<sup>i</sup>

*Healthy land is essential for healthy societies. It is the foundation of our children's future. When land is degraded, so is the future society that relies on it . . . As global community, we must recognise just how precious land is for food security, for our prosperity, and for our health and wellbeing.*

Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith, WCC President from North America

## But what is desertification?

Desertification, or land degradation, is the process by which productive, healthy land is degraded, leading to a **persistent and long-term loss in the environmental quality and natural capital of the land** due to anthropogenic and natural phenomena. It is often the result of unsustainable agricultural practices and has wide-ranging effects on and costs to society. Desertification contributes to global warming and, if it continues at the current rate, will lead to an increase in climate-induced disturbances, biodiversity loss, and food security issues. Rural communities, especially in the drylands, which are home to 1 in 3 people, are most at risk from the effects of desertification.<sup>ii</sup> Climate change puts additional stresses on land, which in turn exacerbate the effects of desertification. Since the pre-industrial period, land surface air temperature has risen almost twice as much as the global average. The IPCC predicts increased impacts on land due to climate change under all greenhouse gas emission scenarios.<sup>iii</sup>

## And what is the response?

**Land restoration** is a critical way to combat desertification and is a vital part of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. To do so requires a holistic response that brings together reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, energy transition, and a shift to more sustainable production. To do so **equitably** requires a just transition, which also considers livelihoods, food security, and water scarcity. Achieving Land Restoration Neutrality by 2030, as part of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, is an aim set out by the UNCCD and is vital to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>iv</sup> Protection from environmental degradation, including desertification, has been recognised as a fundamental human right.<sup>v</sup> This right recognises the disproportionate effects of desertification on the livelihoods of farmers, indigenous communities, and religious communities who depend on lands and water for worship and rituals.

**Land is the lynchpin of multiple intertwined crises**, including climate change and biodiversity loss, and restoration must be part of any response. Protecting land not only supports life and livelihoods but also reduces

greenhouse gas emissions and increases carbon storage. **Faith actors are already contributing to and taking the lead on ecosystem restoration efforts** through tree growing and reforestation, forest protection, sustainable farming initiatives, and by preventing future investments in fossil fuels.<sup>vi</sup>



## Spotlight on the Mediterranean

Desertification is a critical issue for the Mediterranean, and the region is a “hot spot” for global warming. Almost all sub-regions have been affected by anthropogenic climate change. A warmer and drier climate in the region leads to increases in extreme events, the arrival of new pathogens, sea level rise, coastal erosion and threats to food systems. Temperatures are rising 20% faster in the Mediterranean than elsewhere. Desertification is affected by intensive agricultural practices and, in turn affects food security and water scarcity in the region. As the Mediterranean region is highly reliant on fossil fuels, transitioning to renewable energy and improving energy efficiency are critical for the region.<sup>ix</sup>

## What is the connection between desertification and climate-responsible finance?

**Investing in land restoration and ceasing future investments in fossil fuels** are key to combating desertification. It also makes sound economic sense, with the benefits estimated to far exceed the costs.<sup>vii</sup> Financial institutions in the Mediterranean and MENA regions are beginning to implement green finance initiatives, but more action is needed to ensure that financial practices are in line with sustainable futures; many investments remain unsustainable.<sup>viii</sup> **Decarbonising our banking system** is central to responding to complex and intertwined environmental crises. It requires greater transparency from banks, better regulation, and clear pathways which align with land restoration and climate goals. As individual or institutional bank clients, we can support decarbonisation through engaging with our financial institutions.

## What can we do, as people of faith and conscience?

The causes of desertification are complex and multifactorial. But one way we can all combat rising temperatures and unsustainable land use is through the important lever of financial choices.

- Use your power as a bank client to help prevent future investments in fossil fuels and encourage climate-responsible finances: **scan the QR for a practical guide.**



- Raise your voice: use your power as a faith leader to hold financial institutions to account and encourage others to follow suit.
- Support land restoration: promote, participate, and invest in projects focused on restoring ecosystems and combatting desertification and land degradation.

We all have a moral imperative to protect children and future generations from the impacts of desertification and land degradation. Together, we can safeguard the future of our land and livelihoods.



## References

- i UNCCD, 'Global Land Outlook: Second Edition,' Summary for Decision Makers (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 2022), [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-04/GLO2\\_SDM\\_low-res\\_0.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-04/GLO2_SDM_low-res_0.pdf).
- ii UNCCD, 'Global Land Outlook.'
- iii IPCC, 'Summary for Policymakers,' in Climate Change and Land: IPCC Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157988>.
- iv UNCCD, 'Global Land Outlook'; Wolfgang Cramer et al., 'MedECC 2020 Summary for Policymakers.' (MedECC Reports. MedECC Secretariat, Marseille, France, 17 November 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.5513887>.
- v OHCHR, 'Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to a Healthy Environment - UNGA A/RES/76/300', OHCHR, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-environment>.
- vi UNEP, 'How Faith-Based Organizations Are Restoring Nature,' 15 February 2021, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/how-faith-based-organizations-are-restoring-nature>; WWF Tanzania, UNEP, and Trillion Trees, 'Forest Landscape Restoration with Faith-Based Organizations in Tanzania,' 2024, <https://www.wwf.or.tz/?45902/WWF-teams-up-with-Faith-based-Organizations-to-restore-forest-landscapes-in-the-Ruvuma>; UNEP Faith for Earth et al., 'Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Life on Land (SDG 15),' Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2023, <https://fore.yale.edu/blogs/entry/1701112726>; Laura D'Arcy et al., 'Tree Growing for Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration: A Guide for Faith-Based Actors,' WWF Trillion Trees (WWF - World Wide Fund for Nature, 2022), [https://www.panda.org/wwf\\_news/?7230441/Tree-growing-for-conservation-and-ecosystem-restoration-A-guide-for-faith-based-actors-based-organizations-are-restoring-nature](https://www.panda.org/wwf_news/?7230441/Tree-growing-for-conservation-and-ecosystem-restoration-A-guide-for-faith-based-actors-based-organizations-are-restoring-nature).
- vii UNCCD, 'Global Land Outlook'; Cramer et al., 'MedECC 2020 Summary for Policymakers.'
- viii Jeremie Fosse et al., 'Green Finance in the Mediterranean,' IEMed Policy Study (European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2017), [https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/IEMed\\_Policy\\_Study3\\_Green-finance-in-the-Mediterranean.pdf](https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/IEMed_Policy_Study3_Green-finance-in-the-Mediterranean.pdf); Banque de France, 'Greening the Financial System: The New Frontier', Financial Stability Review (Banque de France, 2019), <https://publications.banque-france.fr/en/financial-stability-review/june-2019>; United Nations Environment Programme, 'The Road Towards Banking Decarbonisation: The Case of MENA' (Geneva, 2023), <https://www.unepfi.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-Road-Towards-Banking-Decarbonisation.pdf>.
- ix Philippe Drobinski, 'Climate Change Happens 20% Faster in the Mediterranean,' Polytechnique Insights, 6 April 2021, <https://www.polytechnique-insights.com/en/columns/planet/climate-change-happens-20-faster-in-the-mediterranean/>; Pandi Zdruli, 'Desertification in the Mediterranean Region,' Panorama (IEMed, 2011), <https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Desertification-in-the-Mediterranean-Region.pdf>. Wolfgang Cramer et al., 'MedECC 2020 Summary for Policymakers.'; Olive Oil Times, 'Intensive Olive Farms Contribute to Desertification in Spain, Experts Warn,' Olive Oil Times, 14 September 2021, <https://www.oliveoiltimes.com/world/intensive-olive-farms-contribute-to-desertification-in-spain-experts-warn/98643>; ENI CBC MED, 'Mediterranean Territories Get Ready for Climate Change,' ENI CBC MED, 10 March 2022, <https://www.enicbcmec.eu/mediterranean-territories-get-ready-climate-change-0>.

To share this information with your networks, consider using this **1-minute video** (in English, French, German, and Spanish).





Developed by  
Frederique Seidel, WCC Children and Climate  
programme executive  
Jodie Salter, WCC consultant  
Churches' Commitments to Children programme  
Lyn van Rooyen, WCC Publications coordinator  
Designed by Juliana Schuch

This fact sheet is supported by  
the German Federal Foreign Office.



Federal Foreign Office




**World Council  
of Churches**

Postal address:  
P.O. Box 2100  
CH-1211 Geneva 2  
Switzerland

Visiting address:  
150 Route de Ferney  
Grand-Saconnex (Geneva)  
Switzerland

Tel: (+41 22) 791 6111  
Fax: (+41 22) 791 0361

 worldcouncilofchurches

 @oikoumene

 @worldcouncilofchurches

 wccworld