

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.ⁱ

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?

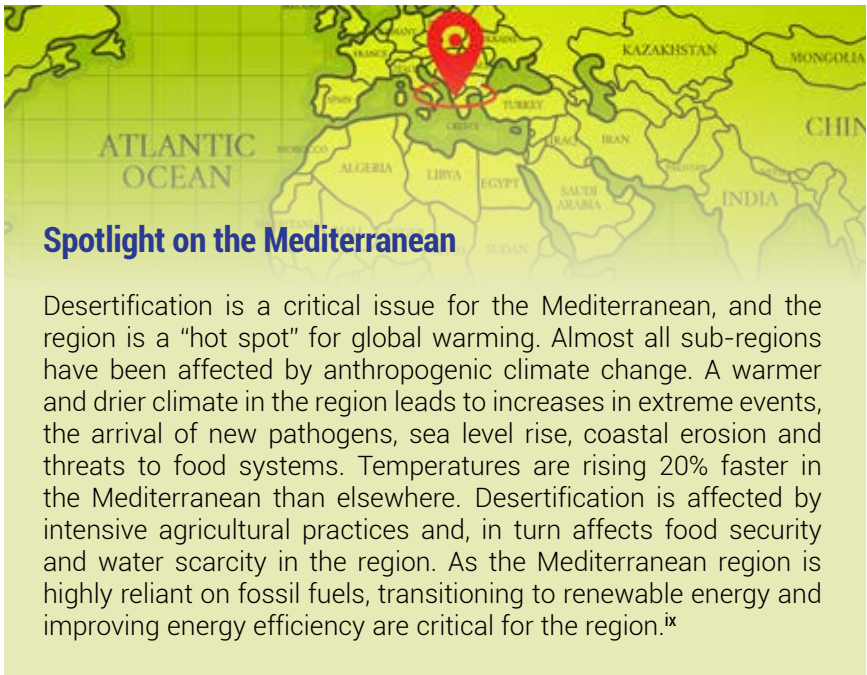
Desertification, or land degradation, is the process by which productive, healthy land is degraded, leading to a **persistent and long-term loss in the environmental quality and natural capital of the land** due to anthropogenic and natural phenomena. It is often the result of unsustainable agricultural 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.ⁱⁱ 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

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.^{iv} Protection from environmental degradation, including desertification, has been recognised as a fundamental human right.^v 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.^{vi}



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.^{vii} 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.^{viii} **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.



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



References

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- 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.enicbcmmed.eu/mediterranean-territories-get-ready-climate-change-0>.



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