



General Assembly

Eleventh Session

Distr.: Upper Elementary

XX September 2016

Original: English

Second Committee – Economic and Financial

This group wants to help the poor. They do this by trying to improve the economy. They discuss national, regional and international markets. Also, they focus on states with special needs. Some examples are the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) or the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs).

This group believes people in poverty can improve their lives. They might discuss how states can receive money. Or, they might find ways technology can help states progress. They also find direct ways to help. For example, they might encourage traditional farming techniques. Or, they might encourage healthy eating. They see connections between health and the economy.

This committee works closely with the UN Economic and Social Council. They have passed resolutions on sustainable development, harmony with nature, and migration.

Agenda Item 20.E – Implementation of the United Nations Convention of Combat Desertification In Those Countries Experiencing Serious Droughts and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa

Background

Desertification and drought is a big problem. Dryland ecosystems around the world are affected. One third of the land on the Earth is in danger. Two billion people are at risk. Most of those people are living in the developing world.

Many people think desertification is normal. It is not. Deserts like the Sahara or Sonoran are natural. Humans did not cause these deserts. They happened over time. Desertification is when once fertile land changes and plants can no longer grow there. It often occurs near the edges of deserts. Our actions in dry and arid areas (often close to deserts) has an impact.

Droughts are making the problem worse. Although droughts are normal and part of climate patterns, human activity increases the problem. Overgrazing is one reason. This is when there are too many animals in an area. The animals will eat all the grass and plants. This reduces the soil's ability to hold onto water. The soil will become dry. The topsoil will blow away leaving the soil underneath which does not have as many nutrients. This is called land degradation. After a number of years, it leads to desertification.

The United Nations is worried about this problem. In 1992 countries decided a convention was needed to fight desertification and droughts. In 1994 countries adopted the convention. It entered into force in 1996. Countries have a duty to help if they signed the convention.

Background

196 countries ratified the convention. This means they will follow its rules. In 2013, Canada, a country that ratified the convention, decided to leave. Canada said it left because not enough money was being spent on programs. Many environmentalists, however, believe Canada's government at the time did not want to support a program that would show climate change is a problem.

To bring attention to the problem the UN has made 2010-2020 the decade of desertification.

Recent Developments

- The Darfur conflict in Sudan was partly because of a drought. Northern nomads went south looking for water sources and came into conflict with groups living there.
- Many people think the Syrian conflict is related to a drought in 2006. Farmers left their farms and went to the cities. This created tensions and helped to fuel the revolution.
- In 2006 Sichuan Province in China experienced a drought. 8 million people were affected.
- The Aral Sea in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan has dried up. It is now 10% of the size it used to be. This happened because the water was taken to water crops.
- Scientists are worried that Lake Balkhash in Kazakhstan could dry up.
- Some countries have created Biodiversity Action Plans. These plans guide countries to stop ecosystems from changing.
- 90% of the people in drylands live in developing countries. Most of these people live in rural areas. When their land can no longer support life they usually move to the cities. This puts pressure on the cities for resources like food and water.
- In 2011-2012 there was a major drought in East Africa. This caused a food crisis in Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. 9.5 million people needed help.
- The drylands store 46% of the world's carbon. Loss of the drylands to desertification would make global warming worse.
- June 17 is The World Day to Combat Desertification. In 2015 the slogan was, "No such thing as a free lunch. Invest in healthy soil."
- Every year an area the size of Bulgaria is lost to desertification. This land could have made 20 million tonnes of grain. This is enough grain to feed 86 million children for a year.

Causes

Poor Land Management

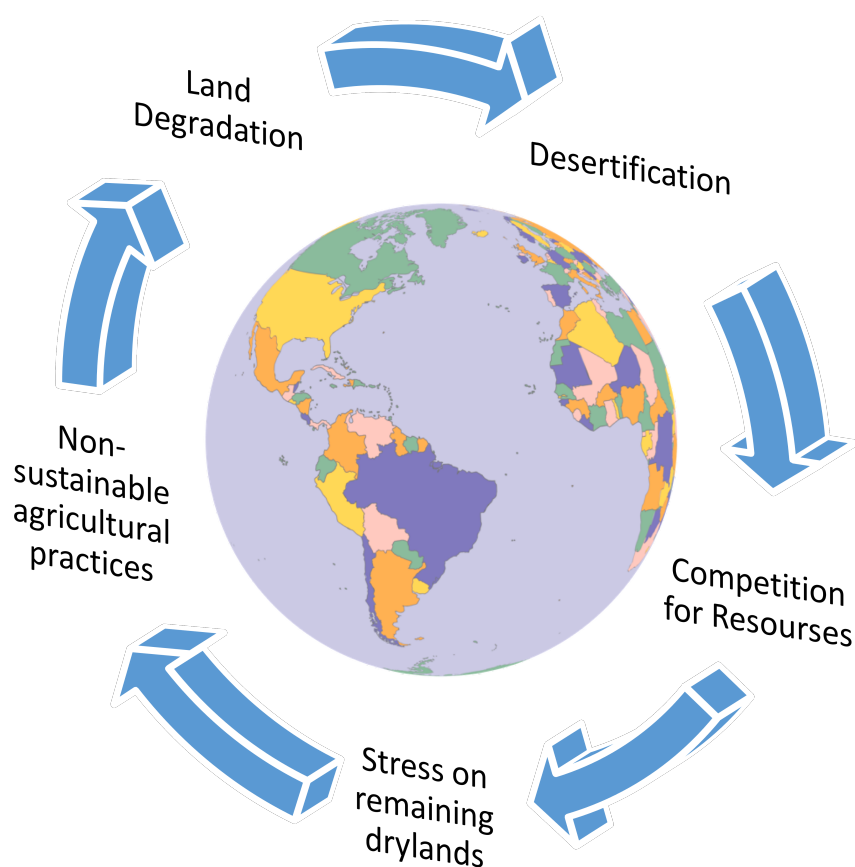
- ✓ Farmers grow too much and use too many chemicals.
- ✓ Crops are grown on hillsides and nothing is done to keep soil from washing away with the rain.
- ✓ Farms mainly plant grain. Crops are not changed and the land is never given time to 'rest'.
- ✓ Burning vegetation to prepare the land. In the past this was a good way to clear land farming. Now, with so much competition for land the soil does not have enough time to get healthy again.

Deforestation

- ✓ Cutting down trees and plants makes the soil looser. Wind and water can carry the soil away.
- ✓ Dead materials from trees and plants help enrich the soil.
- ✓ Trees and plants block the wind. This keeps soil from blowing away.
- ✓ Farm animals can overgraze in an area. This means they eat all the vegetation. You might have fat animals at the end of the season but the plants will not grow back quickly.

Poor Irrigation

- ✓ Water has small amounts of minerals. One of these minerals is salt. If extra water cannot drain away, the salt stays in the soil after all the water evaporates.
- ✓ Some areas in the world have been using underwater aquifers to grow crops. These are lakes under the ground. Now, many of the aquifers are running out.
- ✓ Irrigation encourages people to grow crops that not might not be suited to a dry climate. This reduces biodiversity. Plants native to the region might be better suited to prevent desertification.

The Cycle of Desertification**Possible Solutions**

Agro Ecology

Reforestation

Land Management

Cloud Seeding

Education for farmers

Improved irrigation

?????

?????

What are the best ways to stop desertification?

Guiding Questions

1. What area of your country is covered by drylands? Are they in danger of desertification? How could desertification in neighbouring countries effect your country?
2. Most of the people living on drylands live in poor conditions. Any damage they do to the land is not because they want to – they need to survive! How can people living in drylands be supported to live better lives?
3. Look at some of the possible solutions to desertification on page 3. Research some of them and decide which ones you think are most likely to work.
4. There is a link between desertification, droughts and climate change. How are these three problems connected? If one is solved will the others be solved as well?
5. Does your country have a biodiversity action plan? How might a biodiversity action plan help countries struggling with desertification?
6. How could investing in technology be used to help stop desertification?
7. Why are women an important part of solving this problem?

Resources		
Title	Hyperlink	How is it helpful?
<i>United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification</i>	http://www.un.org/en/events/desertification_decade/	Official site of the Decade of Desertification.
<i>Global Drought Information System</i>	https://www.drought.gov/gdm/current-conditions	Site that monitors droughts around the world.
<i>Is Lack of Water to Blame for the Conflict in Syria?</i>	http://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/is-a-lack-of-water-to-blame-for-the-conflict-in-syria-72513729/?no-ist	Article about the 2006 drought that caused many Syrian farmers to move to cities.
<i>WMO for Youth</i>	http://www.wmo.int/youth	World Meteorological Organization for youth.
<i>Kazakh Lake 'Could Dry Up'</i>	http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3397077.stm	News article about Lake Balkhash drying up.
<i>Global Drylands</i>	http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Publications/Desertification-EN.pdf	A 48 page book that has lots of information. Lots of statistics and maps.
<i>Will the U.S. be a Desert in 50 Years?</i>	http://science.howstuffworks.com/nature/climate-weather/atmospheric/us-desert-50-years.htm	An article about drylands in the United States.
<i>Green Facts: Desertification</i>	http://www.greenfacts.org/en/desertification/index.htm	Extensive question and answer site. Includes sources.
<i>Desertification</i>	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9RxnuBiFbg	A short documentary about the problem.