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## **Living with Deserts: New South-South Partnership Launched**

A new south-south partnership to combat desertification was launched by the United Nations University (UNU), Tokyo, Japan, and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), at the Eighth International Conference on Dry Lands Development, held 25-28 February in Beijing. The bulk of the dry areas under threat of desertification lie in Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA) and in neighboring countries, and are home to over 2.1 billion people.

Desertification, as defined by the UNCCD, is “land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climate variation and human activities.” Land degradation has several dimensions including the loss of biodiversity, soil health, water resources, landscape and agro-productivity. This is what makes desertification difficult to measure, but the human suffering it causes is well known. Much of desertification is human-induced.

Prof. Hans van Ginkel, Rector, UNU, said the joint initiative will follow the Spirit of Bandung, the core principles of which are solidarity, friendship, and cooperation among the countries of Asia and Africa; and the “Beijing Framework for Action on Combating Desertification,” adopted at the Asia-Africa Forum on Combating Desertification in Beijing, China, 5–11 August 1996.

“The objectives of the joint initiative include sharing expertise and facilities, training developing-country scientists, providing opportunities for a Masters’ degree program in integrated land management, and promoting best practices across the vast CWANA region and neighboring dry areas in Western China, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa,” said Prof. Dr Adel El-Beltagy, Director General of ICARDA and Chair of the International Dry Lands Development Commission.

The initiative, named CWANA-Plus Partnership, will use the long experience and existing networks of UNU and ICARDA to link relevant centers of excellence in research and capacity building, identify gaps in research and technology transfer, and select appropriate partners to reach out to the poor who stand in need of support to fight desertification and protect their livelihoods. A Secretariat of the CWANA-Plus Partnership will be established at ICARDA to facilitate the integration and synergy of relevant partners and networks.

The joint initiative will benefit from the recent Millennium Ecosystem Assessment reports, which provide pathways out of desertification to improved ecosystem services and human well-being. Viable options will be provided to the people living in dry areas to improve their livelihoods through mitigating the effects

of desertification and conserving the natural resources of land, water and biodiversity. Efforts will be made to incorporate these options in national policies and strategies to reduce poverty and in national action programs to combat desertification.

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*The mission of UNU ([www.unu.edu](http://www.unu.edu)) is to contribute, through research and capacity building, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems that are the concern of the United Nations, its Peoples and Member States."*

*ICARDA ([www.icarda.org](http://www.icarda.org)) is one of 15 Future Harvest Centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research ([www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org)). The mission of ICARDA is to improve the welfare of poor people in the dry areas of the developing world, through research and training designed to increase the production, productivity and nutritional quality of food to higher sustainable levels, while preventing degradation of the natural resource base and protecting the environment.*

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