



# WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

The Nature Conservancy

Theme: 'United for Land. Our Legacy. Our Future'

## Time to upscale our environmental stewardship

### STATEMENT BY THE CABINET SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND FORESTRY

I am pleased to join the global community and Kenyans in commemorating this World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. The event is organised under the auspices of the **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** to raise awareness on desertification, land degradation and drought, particularly in most affected areas.

I am grateful to the people of Laikipia County for accepting to host this year's national celebrations in Dol-Dol.

The world has entered a phase when many environmental challenges such as desertification, land degradation and drought are happening at an unprecedented rate, creating major global, regional, and national concerns about our livelihoods and sustainable development. This is mainly because these phenomena are happening more frequently and are more severe than ever witnessed before, and they leave a trail of major negative environmental and socio-economic challenges and human suffering. Whereas we have been witnessing good rains recently, the experience of the last worst drought in 40 years of our country's history about two years ago, is still very fresh in our memories. The prolonged drought episode that swept across most parts of our country, awakened national communities to the need to build integrated and proactive management approaches.

Science tells us that the global trends in desertification, land degradation and drought is by and large aggravated by unsustainable human actions, which, unfortunately are projected to keep increasing.



Hon. Soipan Tuyu, EGH

According to the **Global Land Outlook of 2022**, up to 40 percent of the planet's land is degraded, directly affecting half of humanity and threatening roughly half of global GDP (\$44 trillion).

Here in Kenya, the land degradation assessment report of 2016 by the then Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, indicated that about 91 percent of our country was experiencing some form of land degradation, with about 64 percent witnessing high degradation and 27 percent severe degradation. Unfortunately, land degradation by our unsustainable actions is still ongoing. Science is repeatedly indicating that these unsustainable actions will fuel desertification and drought manifestation, and will subsequently plunge communities to further challenges if we do not act now. Certainly, the challenges will be more pronounced among the most vulnerable members of our society, largely women and children.

The theme for this year's World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, is **'United for Land. Our Legacy. Our Future'**. It focuses on the future of land stewardship to ensure the stability and prosperity of billions of people around the world. Indeed, stewardship plays a

critical role in advancing healthy land and soils, which provide us with almost 95 percent of our food and are home to plants and animals, provide jobs and livelihoods, and protect us from the worsening droughts and floods as recently witnessed. Therefore, I call upon all of us individually and collectively to upscale our environmental stewardship towards meeting the 15 billion trees target by 2032.

To address environmental challenges, the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry, has been on the frontline of advancing environmental stewardship. Key to the initiatives has been policies, strategies, plans, and on-the-ground activities. The ministry, in collaboration with stakeholders, is implementing important policy frameworks to provide an enabling environment for ecosystems restoration. They include:

- **National Environment Policy, 2014**, which is the main framework policy on sustainable environment management, including desertification, land degradation and drought control.
- **National Sustainable Waste Management Policy of 2021**, which focuses on waste management, with provisions on land degradation control and sustainable land management aspects.
- **Green Economy Strategy and Implementation Plan 2016 – 2030**, focusing on low carbon, resource efficient, equitable and inclusive socio-economic transformation.
- **National Forest Programme 2016 – 2030**, which seeks to provide a strategic framework for forest policy, planning and implementation to coordinate the sector's development and also to sustain and restore the resilience of forests in the country by ensuring they are able to withstand

and recover from climate-related stresses and disturbances.

- **The Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)**, which is aligned with the UNCCD and seeks to restore the country's degraded landscapes.
- **The National Landscapes & Ecosystems Restoration Strategy** towards the 15 Billion Tree Growing Initiative.

To realise the provisions of these policies, programmes and strategies, the ministry, in collaboration with stakeholders, has been successfully driving the 15 billion trees growing programme, which will be the game changer in the restoration of our environment and address desertification, land degradation and drought as advocated by the UNCCD. I am happy to report that since the launch of the initiative in the year 2022, tree growing is seamlessly happening across the country, making a major contribution in environmental restorations, thanks to the recent rains that have boosted the efforts of the exercise.

I am happy to further report that according to recent monitoring reports, notably the **Kenya State of Environment Report**, we have surpassed the constitutional threshold of 10 percent tree cover to attain 12.3 percent. This is a major milestone in addressing desertification, land degradation and drought.

I note that the key build-up activity during this commemoration of World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought was on tree growing, and about **50,000 tree seedlings** have been mobilised for planting. This year's celebration has therefore brought a great long-lasting resilience project to the Maiyanat community. I urge the collaborations already established to be further nurtured to continue building joint environmental and community resilience projects.

### STATEMENT BY THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY, STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE



Dr. Eng. Festus Ng'eno

Kenya's fascinating landscapes are facing threats of degradation, with the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) being the most vulnerable. Recent reports show that the greatest part of our total land mass in the country is already affected by land degradation. The integrity of our rangeland ecosystems therefore continues to be compromised largely due to unsustainable human exploitations, climate change, invasive species, and biodiversity loss.

The inhabitants of these expansive landscapes are mainly pastoralists and livestock breeders, who face extreme challenges such as water scarcity, common crop failures, inadequate pasture for livestock and diminishing opportunities for livelihoods. As landscapes face the wrath of land degradation coupled with desertification and drought manifestation, the ecological conditions force communities to enter nomadic lifestyles and forced migration. This disorganises community lifestyles, resulting in disregard of critical initiatives and activities that contribute to environmental stewardship for improving ecosystems integrity.

This year's theme for the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought urges everyone to strength-

en landscape restoration efforts using multifaceted approaches from the grassroots level through to sub-national and national levels. This can only be achieved through coordination and collaboration of all relevant stakeholders towards implementing sustainable land restoration plans and strategies.

As a country, we all need to drive environmental stewardship as advocated by the theme of this year's celebrations, by strengthening our governance systems and adequately facilitating implementation of our policies and regulations, strategies, and plans. The effective implementation of these policies, strategies and plans will result in sustainable production models that are necessary for driving lasting environmental conservation that will contribute to addressing the risk of exacerbating desertification, land degradation and drought manifestation.

The State Department of Environment and Climate Change is aware of the current patterns of desertification, land degradation, and drought risks. To mitigate them and avoid sliding further to a land degradation crisis, the ministry is applying a multifaceted approach.

For instance, the ministry, in collaboration with relevant stakehold-

ers, has been spearheading restoration initiatives across the country. Some stakeholders have been undertaking data collection on the various ecosystem restoration initiatives, particularly the tree growing, notably using the innovative **Jaza Miti** App. I am informed that the information generated so far is painting a great picture on our tree growing initiatives aligned to the 15 billion tree growing campaign. Indeed, application of data is critical for guiding the management of the programmes.

My special recognition to all institutions, organisations and establishments that are based within Laikipia County for showing great solidarity in driving ecosystem agenda as has been demonstrated at the tree planting spot at the Maiyanat community land restoration site.

The demonstration pilot is a unique model that can serve as learning and research centre. I therefore call upon the local conservation stakeholders to support the communities in making this demonstration site a true ecosystem and research centre. I look forward to another visit to witness the progress on this fascinating restoration model.

## Employing collaborative efforts to secure sustainable futures in Kenya

### STATEMENT FROM THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

This year's theme for World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, **'United for Land. Our Legacy. Our Future'**, underscores the importance of collective action to preserve our planet's vital land resources for future generations. This is the approach that The Nature Conservancy (TNC) applies in our conservation work.

Land is the foundation of our people, wildlife, and biodiversity. The Horn of Africa, including regions within Kenya, has recently experienced some of its worst droughts in decades with severe socio-economic and environmental impacts directly affecting millions of people through loss of livelihoods and increased conflict over diminishing resources. Climate change further exacerbates these issues, posing significant challenges to sustainable land management and agriculture, and undermining ecosystems' resilience.

Protecting and restoring degraded land is essential to ending poverty and hunger, achieving food security, and improving the livelihoods of millions of people, especially in developing countries. The sustainable management of land, soil and water resources are essential for increasing food production, conserving ecosystems, and strengthening the resilience of rural communities to extreme weather events and climate change.

Integrated land-use planning, land governance, and land tenure security are fundamental to restoring landscapes. The implementation of the plans and policies requires an integrated and holistic approach that brings together stakeholders from National and County Government, communities and non-governmental organisations.

TNC, in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and our implementing partners such as Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), Grevy's Zebra Trust, Wyss Academy for Nature, Laikipia Conservancies Association, Loldaiga Conservancy, Loisaba Conservancy, and Community Conservancies, is contributing towards restoring degraded land in Northern Kenya by supporting significant land management and restoration efforts. These include grazing planning and management, rangeland restoration, tree growing and forest protection, and control of alien invasive species such as *Opuntia*. Thousands of acres of degraded land have been restored using semi-circular bunds which are effective at mitigating soil erosion, increasing ground water recharge, and improving soil fertility while simultaneously greening and cooling the earth.

For sustainable implementation of the drought and desertification interventions, community-based governance structures are a vital enabler. TNC, NRT, Grevy's Zebra Trust and other partners are working to strengthen community-based governance through continuous training and learning exchange across the region.

Investing in nature-based enterprises is an important element in ensuring that communities participate in and benefit from ecosystem restoration and protection efforts. TNC and its partners are supporting initiatives such as the promotion of grass seed banks which not only provide income for local women but also contribute to land restoration efforts. The grass banks project has allowed communities to sell seeds and plant them to stabilise soils and improve pasture.

TNC will continue to collaborate with the Government of Kenya, local communities, NGOs, and conservancies to apply a multi-faceted approach that integrates scientific research with traditional knowledge, like the incorporation of indigenous drought-resilience practices alongside modern conservation techniques to achieve sustainable land management. Along with our partners, we are dedicated to enhancing the resilience of Kenya's arid and semi-arid landscapes and will continue to innovate further in conservation strategies and support.

We urge all stakeholders in Kenya to mobilise additional resources and investments to sustain and scale up successful conservation practices. Through innovative partnerships and community empowerment, we can all help to combat drought and desertification and secure sustainable futures for the regions most affected by climate change – for people and nature.



The invasive Engelmann prickly pear at Loisaba Conservancy, Kenya. PHOTO | ROSHNI LODHIA/TNC