



Bamako International Conference on Youth and Desertification

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FOR A BETTER TOMORROW: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DRYLANDS

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I. SUMMARY

1. The twin issues of youth and desertification have long been an important development concern. Since the first international conference on desertification was organized in 1977, there have been many other events and efforts to fight desertification and increase the participation of young people in the fight. One major outcome of these efforts was the adoption, in 1994, of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). International support for the Convention has been growing ever since, and by July 2006, over 191 countries had ratified it.
2. Although much has been achieved in the fight against desertification since the adoption of the UNCCD, progress has been checkered. Consequently, the United Nations General Assembly, at its fifty-eighth session, adopted resolution 58/211 declaring 2006 as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD). In adopting the resolution, the General Assembly underscored its great concern about increasing desertification, especially in Africa, and noted the effect of this trend on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
3. The main aims of the IYDD were to increase awareness about the problem of desertification, about protecting the biodiversity of deserts, and about traditional knowledge of communities affected by desertification. Other objectives range from increasing networking among stakeholders to dissemination of information about UNCCD.
4. The international community proposed that a series of international events be held to assess the role of key stakeholders in the UNCCD implementation process. Activities planned for the IYDD include conferences and symposia on women and desertification, non-governmental organizations and desertification, and desertification and migration. The outcome of these conferences and consultations will be presented at a summit of heads of State to be held in Algeria, coinciding with the end of the IYDD.
5. The international conference on youth and desertification, which will be held in Bamako, Mali, in September 2006, is part of the above-mentioned series of events marking the IYDD. The Bamako conference is expected to enable participants to explore all forms of participation of young people in the fight against desertification, and to address the effects of desertification on young people. Participants will also identify measures for combating desertification, and address major concerns for youth such as poverty, unemployment, education, migration, health, conflicts and access to land.

6. This background paper aims to serve both as a primer on youth and desertification, and as an advocacy tool on the issue. It provides a global perspective on the issue of desertification and youth, and an overview of the challenges faced and opportunities that exist. After an introductory overview of the issue of desertification and youth, the paper deals with desertification and development; the challenges posed by desertification to youth in drylands; and opportunities and success stories about youth in drylands. The concluding section gives recommendations for increasing the involvement of young people in the fight against desertification.

7. Desertification has been defined as the degradation of drylands (i.e. land in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas), and results in the loss of biological and/or economic productivity, and in complexity in croplands, pastures and woodlands. Desertification is a worldwide phenomenon in drylands, which occupy an estimated 40 per cent of the Earth's land area, and are home to more than two billion people.

8. Young people form a large proportion of the global population, in both numeric and socio-economic contexts. Although the proportion of young people in the global population is projected to decline from 18 per cent in 2000 to 15 per cent by 2025, they will still number more than 1.2 billion in 2015. It is for this reason that the issues of desertification and youth are important, both individually and collectively.

9. Young people living in drylands face several challenges, such as poverty and access to education, health care and land. Many of these challenges frequently result in, or are exacerbated by, conflicts and migration. The importance of poverty for young people in drylands is based on the fact that it is so prevalent in drylands, and the causative relationship between drylands and poverty. Thus, poverty in countries in the arid zones of the Sahelian region of Africa is more prevalent than in more humid zones of the region. Furthermore, progress towards the poverty reduction targets of the MDGs has been especially checkered in those countries where large proportions of the population live in drylands. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the poverty rate increased between 1990 and 2001, despite numerous efforts to reduce it.

10. Other challenges faced by young people in drylands include finding employment and gaining access to quality education and health services, and land. Given that global youth unemployment has increased steadily since 1993, and reached a record high of 88 million in 2003, it is clear that young people in drylands, who are already disadvantaged in many ways, are especially vulnerable to unemployment. In the same vein, the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is especially threatening to young people in the drylands, because half of all new HIV cases are seen in young people, and 25 per cent of people living with HIV are under 25 years of age. Other health concerns such as smoking and drug abuse also loom large over the lives of young people in the drylands.

11. Against this background, it is not surprising that many young people in drylands choose to migrate, either in their own countries, or to foreign lands. An estimated 26 million migrants constituting 15 per cent of the global migrant population are young people. Such migration has far-reaching effects – both adverse and helpful. Migrants now constitute an important source of foreign exchange, with remittances reaching USD 167 billion in 2005 – far exceeding all forms of international aid combined.

12. Despite the various challenges faced by young people in drylands, there are also opportunities for them to improve their lot and increase their contribution to development efforts. As evidenced by the success stories highlighted in the paper, the story of young people in drylands is not all doom and gloom. Frequently, the most heart-warming achievements are found in the most desolate place, and among the most wretched people of the Earth. In India, for example, a participatory watershed management project has not only halted the imminent demise of a community, but increased income and rejuvenated the environment. Work with young people in Cape Verde, Lesotho and Gambia has demonstrated the utility of youth employment and income-generating programmes that also help in environmental conservation.

13. In light of the challenges faced by young people in drylands, and the evidence that all is not hopeless, that progress is being made, the paper concludes with a number of recommendations for increasing the involvement of young people in the fight against desertification. They include increasing advocacy and resource mobilization efforts, building and strengthening partnerships, and creating enabling policy environments for the greater involvement of young people in the fight against desertification. It is hoped that this background paper will provide a sound basis for dialogue at the

Bamako conference, and an impetus for positive action on the issue of youth and desertification to ensure better lives for young people, today and tomorrow. Young people, the key to a better tomorrow, deserve nothing less.

II. BACKGROUND

14. “Against the global challenge of desertification there is an urgent need to invest in the youth since they are the key to today’s challenges and the hope for a better tomorrow.” Those are the words of Mr. Hristo Stoitchkov, international football star and Honorary Spokesperson for the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD). The importance of young people in the fight against desertification is predicated on the fact that they are critical to the success of ongoing efforts, and that, ultimately, the future belongs to them.

15. Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas (drylands), and results in the loss of biological and/or economic productivity, and in complexity in croplands, pastures and woodlands (UNCCD, 2005a). Desertification is mainly caused by climatic variability and environmentally detrimental activities such as over-cultivation, overgrazing and poor irrigation practices; it directly affects more than 250 million people worldwide, and about 1 billion people altogether are at risk (UNCCD, 2005a). Many of the people affected by desertification are poor and marginalized, and live in poor developing countries.

16. Young people are an important part of the populations living in drylands and affected by desertification. According to the World Youth Report 2005, (UNDESA, 2005), the term “youth” refers to people in the 15 to 24 year age group, which forms a large proportion of the global population (UNDESA, 2005). Nevertheless, it must be noted that this definition can vary from region to region. Although the proportion of young people in the global population is projected to decline from 18 per cent in 2000 to 15 per cent by 2025, they will still number more than 1.2 billion in 2015.

17. The twin issues of desertification and the role of young people in development have long been major development concerns. For this reason, desertification was one of the major concerns of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. One outcome of UNCED was the adoption of Agenda 21, which called for, among other things, a new, integrated approach to the problem of desertification, and emphasized the need to promote sustainable development at the community level. Agenda 21 also recommended that the United Nations General Assembly establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to prepare a convention to combat desertification, especially in Africa. The Convention was adopted in 1994, and as at July 2006 counted 191 Parties. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was negotiated and adopted in recognition of the fact that desertification and drought have adverse effects (such as poverty, forced migration, conflict and climatic variability), on sustainable development.

18. Since the adoption of the UNCCD, a lot of progress has been made in the fight against desertification, and in mitigating its effects. However, the progress has been checkered. For this reason, the twenty-second session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/Global Ministerial Environment Forum called on the United Nations General Assembly to declare an international year of deserts and desertification (United Nations, 2005). Thus, the General Assembly, at its fifty-eighth session, adopted a resolution declaring 2006 as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD). The General Assembly underscored its great concern about increasing desertification, especially in Africa, and noted the effect of this trend on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

19. The IYDD is aimed at increasing awareness about the problem of desertification, and at protecting the biodiversity of deserts and traditional knowledge of communities affected by desertification (United Nations, 2005). The IYDD is expected to achieve a number of objectives ranging from increasing networking among stakeholders, to dissemination of information about the UNCCD.

20. The international community proposed that a series of international events should be held to assess the role of key stakeholders in the UNCCD implementation process (UNCCD, 2006b). Activities planned for the IYDD include a conference on women and the fight against desertification, (UNCCD, 2006a), seminars and symposiums. International conferences on civil society organizations

and desertification, and on youth and desertification, are also planned. The outcomes of these conferences and consultations will be presented at a summit of heads of State to be held in Algeria, and which will coincide with the end of the IYDD.

21. The international conference on youth and desertification will be held in Bamako, Mali, and is expected to enable participants to explore all forms of participation of young people in the fight against desertification, and address the consequences of desertification on young people (UNCCD, 2006b). Participants will also identify measures for combating desertification, and for addressing other major concerns for young people, such as poverty, unemployment, education, migration, health, conflicts and access to land.

22. This background paper serves both as a primer on youth and desertification, and as an advocacy tool on the issue. The paper provides a global perspective on the issue, and an overview of the challenges faced, and opportunities that exist. Although desertification has important gender and rights dimensions, and affects women in special ways, these issues have been dealt with in various forums (e.g. the Beijing Conference on Women and Desertification) and as such, are not discussed in detail in this paper.

23. After an introductory chapter on desertification and development, the paper gives an overview of the challenges of desertification for young people. While young people in drylands face many challenges, this paper focuses on the above-mentioned concerns such as poverty, unemployment, and education faced by the youth in drylands. The paper ends with two sections, one on the opportunities and success stories about young people in drylands, and finally, conclusions and recommendations on the development of young people in drylands.

III. DESERTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT

24. Desertification, which largely takes place in drylands, afflicts all continents. The causes of desertification are varied, and vary over time and location; they include social, economic and policy factors, as well as globalization, climate change and land use (UNCCD, 2005a). Drylands occupy an estimated 40 per cent of the Earth's land area, are home to more than two billion people, and are distributed unevenly across the world (MEF, 2001; WRI, 2005a).

25. The effects of desertification are generally adverse. Examples include reduced soil productivity and resilience to climatic variability, damage to vegetation, and a decline in food production (UNCCD, 2005a). Desertification can also impact areas outside those directly affected, for example, causing flooding, reduced water quality and siltation of reservoirs.

26. Desertification also affects people, young people in particular. It sometimes causes or contributes to famine, especially where drought and land degradation lead to crisis and conflict. It also reduces agricultural production, exacerbates chronic poverty, leads to unemployment of human resources and undermines economic development, provoking instability and migratory drift in search of work and better standards of living. The resultant migration deprives communities of the human resources needed for food production and economic development, thus exacerbating food insecurity, poverty and underdevelopment of these areas. This is a threat to all nations, poor and rich alike. The instability, conflict, disease and desertification associated with poverty threaten the overall social and economic development of the world, including international peace and security.

27. As well as being an environmental and physical phenomenon, desertification is a deeply human problem. Thus the implementation of the UNCCD is of critical importance. At the core of the implementation of the UNCCD are national action programmes (NAPs) to combat desertification. The NAPs are aimed at addressing the root causes of desertification and drought, and identifying measures for preventing, mitigating, or reversing them. Furthermore, NAPs are complemented by subregional and regional action programmes, especially where transboundary resources are involved.

28. The Convention strongly emphasizes a "bottom-up" approach that puts local communities on an equal footing with other development actors. This approach calls for strong local participation in decision-making, and in the formulation of action programmes. It is in this context that the participation of young people in the fight against desertification is particularly important.

IV. YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES OF DESERTIFICATION

29. Major international conferences such as the Beijing conference and the World Summit on Sustainable Development have all emphasized the importance of involving young people in development and the fight against desertification. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1995 to provide a policy framework and practical guidelines for improving the welfare of young people (United Nations, 1995). And the General Assembly has called for measures to encourage more young people to take the opportunity to become involved in voluntary activities; the Secretary-General of the United Nations has underlined that the power of volunteerism to engage young people and to promote action will be a key contributor to achieving the MDGs (UNDESA, 2005; United Nations, 2000).

30. Young people have also been at the forefront of charting the course on environment and development. Both Agenda 21 and the UNCCD emphasize the importance of involving grassroots organizations, and communities in general and young people in particular, in the fight against desertification. Thus, chapter 25 of Agenda 21 noted that young people should actively participate in relevant decision-making processes, given that the decisions affect their lives today, and in the future. Besides, young people have valuable intellectual contributions to make, can mobilize support, and bring unique perspectives that can help the fight against desertification.

31. Article 5 of the UNCCD states that countries should promote awareness and facilitate the participation of local populations, especially women and young people, in the fight against desertification. This should be done in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to further strengthen efforts to fight desertification, and reduce the effects of drought (UNCCD, 2006b).

A. Desertification, young people and poverty

32. Much progress has been made in improving the lot of young people around the world, but work remains to be done on poverty eradication. In 2002, for example, 18 per cent of all young people, numbering some 209 million, lived on less than USD 1 per day, and 515 million lived on less than USD 2 per day (UNDESA, 2005). South Asia had the largest share (40 per cent) of the global population of young people living in poverty, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa with 29 per cent of the global total.

33. Poverty reduction has become an important development paradigm in recent years. For this reason, many governments, NGOs, donor agencies and international development organizations such as the World Bank now place poverty reduction high on their agenda.

34. Indications are there is a strong correlation between poverty and desertification. Desertification increases poverty, reduces the productivity of the land, decreases food security and health prospects and undermines economic development. Desertification has made poverty endemic and perpetuated mismanagement of natural resources in developing countries. Consequently, combating desertification and the protection and sustainable management of the environment and of natural resources is an essential part of poverty eradication and economic development.

35. Inversely, poverty is a major cause of desertification and resource depletion that threaten developing countries. Persistent poverty contributes to accelerated desertification and degradation of natural resources. In developing countries, particularly in Africa, it is often poverty that forces rural people to eke out their livelihoods at the expense of the natural resources that are their sole means of survival, exacerbating desertification. Hence poverty eradication is not only a moral imperative, but also a prerequisite for environmental sustainability, combating desertification and economic development. At the individual level, poverty affects prospects for getting an education and access to healthcare, and consequently reduces life expectancy.

36. Poverty is worse in drier zones than in the wetter zones, according to the 1997 Human Development Report (WRI, 2005a). Specifically, in 10 countries in the Sahelian region of Africa, countries in the humid zone had a human poverty index of 25 per cent, compared to 61 per cent for those in the arid zones. The Human Poverty Index, rather than measure poverty by income, uses indicators of the most basic dimensions of deprivation: a short life, lack of basic education, and lack of access to public and private resources.

37. Much progress towards alleviating poverty has been made in China and India. The poverty rate in China decreased between 1990 and 2001 from 33 per cent to 17 per cent. In India, the poverty rate declined from 42 per cent to 35 per cent over the same period. However, the number of poor people remains essentially unchanged in India, because of population growth (UN Millennium Project, 2005b). These findings have important bearings on young people in drylands, given that India and China have the largest number of young people living on less than USD 1 a day, at 68 million, and 33 million, respectively (UNDESA, 2005).

38. The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa is in stark contrast to the progress being made in Asia. As desertification takes its toll, many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa face major challenges in meeting the poverty MDGs. Indeed, as desertification increases, and agricultural production and economic performance decline, poverty is on the rise in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the number of people living on less than USD 1 a day increasing from 227 million in 1990 to 313 million in 2001 – an increase in poverty rate from 45 per cent to 46 per cent (UN Millennium Project, 2005b). Given that 41 per cent of Africa's population lives in the drylands, and 4 of the 10 countries with the largest number of young people in extreme poverty are in Africa, there is no doubt that the increase in poverty in Africa will have adverse effects on young people in the region as the effects of desertification continue to be felt (UNDESA, 2005; WRI, 2005a).

39. The situation is more encouraging in the Middle East and North Africa, where poverty rates are consistently low at 2 per cent, even though there was a slight increase in the population from 6 million to 7 million over the period 1990 to 2001 (UN Millennium Project, 2005b). Latin America and the Caribbean also had fairly constant poverty rates. However, Eastern Europe and Central Asia showed sharp increases in poverty over the same period. These findings will certainly have considerable impacts on young people in the drylands given that these areas also have large dryland areas.

40. The foregoing indicates persistent and widespread poverty in drylands. The effect of poverty on young people in drylands is far-reaching in many respects, ranging from personal income to human well-being. First, the per capita gross national product (GDP) of developing countries, where more than 90 per cent of people in drylands live, is only one tenth of that of OECD countries (MEF, 2001). Another dimension of the effect of poverty on young people in the drylands is the limited access to clean water and adequate sanitation, which predisposes them to poor health. Extreme poverty also makes many young people vulnerable to exploitation (both sexual and in the labour market); an estimated 59 million young people between 15 and 17 years old are engaged in hazardous forms of work (YEN, 2006).

41. Young people also suffer other general problems of people in drylands, namely political marginalization, and lack of education and health services, facilities, and infrastructure. To make matters worse, drylands registered the highest population growth rate (18.5 per cent) in the 1990s, thus putting more pressure on existing meagre resources (MEF, 2001).

42. Not only does poverty affect the lives of people and their communities, it also impacts national development and international relations. The most important threat to sustainable development and global stability is the combined effects of desertification, poverty, and the widening gap between the rich and the desperately poor.

B. Desertification and youth unemployment

43. Poverty is both a result and cause of economic stagnation, and often leads to few job opportunities. Poverty can also result in inadequate education, thus reducing prospects for finding quality work, or any work at all. Youth unemployment has increasingly been of concern to policymakers and the development community, not only because of the increasing population of young people and unemployed young people, but also because of fears that such unemployment may result in unrest and violence, as recently emphasized by the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA, 2005). Many conflicts in West Africa have been fuelled by youth unemployment and the attendant poverty, and so employment creation and poverty reduction are important elements of efforts to bring peace to the subregion.

44. Global youth unemployment has increased steadily since 1993, and reached a record high of 88 million in 2003, in spite of progress made in education (ILO, 2004; UNDESA, 2005). Furthermore, unemployed young people form a disproportionate share of the total unemployed, given that they account for 18 per cent of the world's population, but about 40 per cent of the unemployed (ILO, 2004; UNDESA, 2004) and 25 per cent of the working-age population (ILO, 2004).

45. Young people in developing countries are the most disadvantaged when it comes to finding work. Even though they make up a higher proportion of the labour force than their counterparts in industrialized countries (21.8 per cent versus 14 per cent in 2003), young people in developing countries are more likely to be unemployed.

46. As expected, there also are regional differences in youth unemployment. The highest number of unemployed young people in 2003 was recorded in South Asia, (about 17 million) whereas the Middle East and North Africa recorded the smallest number of unemployed young people (8.2 million) (ILO, 2004). However, the largest increase in youth unemployment between 1993 and 2003 was in South-East Asia, and the smallest increase occurred in South Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa had a much smaller increase in youth unemployment than did the Middle East and North Africa.

47. Youth unemployment rates also show regional variations. Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean recorded an increase in youth unemployment between 1993 and 2003, but Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa registered slight decreases (ILO, 2004). Thus, the trends in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean are very much in line with global trends, which showed an increase in youth unemployment rates from 11.7 per cent in 1993 to 14.4 per cent in 2003.

48. It is clear that desertification plays an important role in youth unemployment in most developing countries. However, there are many complex factors that have negative influences on employment creation, particularly for the youth. The economies of many developing countries, and the livelihoods of the majority of the people in these countries, are dependent on agriculture. Consequently, land is intensively used, leading to land degradation, desertification and declining agricultural production. The decline in agricultural production in countries affected by desertification has tended to undermine economic development and hence employment creation, particularly for young people.

49. The effects of unemployment on young people in drylands are mostly pernicious and felt both at personal and societal levels. At the personal level, unemployment denies young people all the attendant benefits of a job: a source of income, dignity and self-respect (ILO, 2002). Sustained unemployment can lead to social exclusion and exacerbate poverty. It is thus easy to see how youth unemployment reinforces the acute poverty that already exists in many drylands, and predisposes these areas to conflict and social unrest (UNOWA, 2005).

50. It will take a multi-faceted strategy to bring about economic development and employment creation as well as a reduction in desertification and poverty. Direct measures have to be taken to enhance the access of those in extreme poverty to improved human welfare, food, education, political stability, etc. This will empower them to break out of the poverty trap and allow them to participate fully in development processes. Poverty is thus doubly important: first in absolute terms, and second in terms of its effects on other concerns such as education, health and unemployment.

51. At the same time, efforts must be stepped up to combat desertification and promote broad-based agricultural and rural development that will create employment opportunities for the affected population and achieve a sustainable abolition of poverty. Furthermore, strategic efforts are needed at

create the conditions for unemployment. This includes eradicating poverty and reviving agriculture to

However, agricultural change should be linked to social changes that give the poor greater power over

C. Desertification and youth migration

52. Migration has always been an integral part of human life. It has served the individual, family and country, but at the same time, and especially in recent times, it has also been a source of friction in international relations. Migration is also propelled by desertification.

53. When people live in poverty, they have little choice but to overexploit the land. This leads to desertification which, together with drought, eventually makes land uneconomical to farm, thus forcing people to leave their homes in search of better lives. Other factors such as globalization, developments in ICT and conflict also greatly affect youth migration. Globalization, for example, has profoundly changed the job market, and with desertification inducing poverty and unemployment, young people are frequently the most vulnerable to these changes.

54. Desertification is one of the main factors in the migration of young people, subsistence farmers and pastoralists to the slums and shantytowns of major cities in search of a higher standard of living. Desertification undermines human security by reducing access to, and the quality of, natural resources necessary to sustain people's livelihoods. Consequently, people migrate, and become more vulnerable to diseases, prone to exploitation, and liable to being victims of crime.

55. Also, migration from rural to urban areas not only exacerbates the already dire urban problems of many developing countries affected by desertification, but delays efforts to rehabilitate and develop rural economies of drylands because of decreased rural manpower and increased negligence of the land. The link between migration and desertification was important to the international community's recognition of desertification as a truly global problem, like climate change or loss of biodiversity. The links between desertification and human migration are multidimensional. The causal factors are typically numerous, interactive and operate over a wide range of temporal and spatial scales. The human responses are usually equally complex, involving as they do the aggregation of individual and collective decisions of the migrants and of decision makers in the regions and countries they transit and to which they eventually relocate.

56. At greatest risk are those at the low end of the socio-economic spectrum such as young people and women, both in developed and developing regions. In developing regions, the poorest inhabitants are often forced to live on marginal land outside urban areas or coastal zones – land that is potentially prone to desertification.

57. A common perception is that most migration occurs from the developing countries towards the industrialized countries, largely as a result of the perceived economic attractiveness and overall better "quality of life" of the industrialized world. However, most people who seek to migrate are pushed by circumstances in their home countries. Desertification, war, poverty and persecution prompt people to become refugees, asylum seekers and labour migrants. Migrations can also be triggered when essential resources such as water or food fall below critical thresholds in a given region.

58. The impact of migration on development is multifaceted, with both origin and destination countries affected in a variety of ways. For example, the countries of origin of the migrants benefit from remittances, poverty reduction, investment promotion and investment by returning migrants, but at the same time, they suffer the loss of human capital (United Nations, 2006). Destination countries can benefit from migration through urban renewal and increased diversity. In addition, migrants often bring about economic renewal in destination countries because they build and strengthen trade ties, enlarge the labour force and the pool of consumers, and contribute their entrepreneurial skills. But migration sometimes has adverse effects in destination countries, such as problems of integration and increased unemployment for local people.

59. The sheer volume of remittances to developing countries from migrant workers is perhaps the most dramatic indicator of the effect of migration on development. In 2005 alone, such remittances reached USD 167 billion, and exceeded all forms of international aid combined (United Nations, 2006). However, not all migrants move from developing to developed countries. Indeed, movement from one developing country to another (so-called "South – South" migration) now accounts for about a third of the nearly 200 million migrants (United Nations, 2006).

60. Although most migration data is not disaggregated by age, estimates are that 26 million migrants constituting 15 per cent of the global migrant population, are young people (UNCCD, 2006b). Young people are thus an important part of the global migrant population, both in terms of their numeric strength and the effects of youth migration on both their countries of origin and the countries they end up in. This is especially so given the daily influx of thousands of young people into the ranks of illegal immigrants. This leads to a parallel industry of human trafficking where traffickers and other middlemen victimize many of these young migrants, especially women.

61. For young people in the drylands, migration presents a number of challenges and opportunities. Many young people in drylands are confronted with the difficult choice of either staying in the rural areas, or migrating to cities and other more industrialized countries in search of work and a better life. This often results in the hollowing-out of societies, leaving behind the females, the young, and old men. In the extreme, the very survival of these communities is threatened.

62. It is in light of these challenges that a number of initiatives and efforts have been launched to deal with the challenges of migration, especially for young people in drylands. It has now been recognized that international migration cannot be managed unilaterally, and hence there have been calls for greater cooperation among all stakeholders. For this reason, the United Nations will organize a high-level dialogue on the issue (United Nations, 2006). In addition, an international symposium on desertification and migration will be held later in 2006 to commemorate both the IYDD and the 12th anniversary of another symposium on the same theme.

D. Health

63. The World Health Organization (WHO) of the United Nations defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not just the absence of disease or infirmity (UNDESA, 2005). For this reason, youth health must be addressed holistically, and in a manner that goes beyond the health sector, and involves the active participation of all social actors, not only young people (UNDESA, 2004).

64. The issue of youth health is important because more than 3 billion people (almost half of the world's population) are under 25 years of age. Furthermore, 5 per cent of young people live in developing countries, and many of them live in poverty.

65. Unfortunately, desertification is a day-to-day threat in contemporary society, where the struggle for development and the effort to increase food production are set against a background of population growth and demographic change. The deterioration of productive ecosystems is an obvious and serious threat to food security, human health and economic progress. In exceptionally fragile ecosystems, such as those on the desert margins, the loss of biological productivity through the degradation of plant, animal, soil and water resources can easily become irreversible, and permanently reduce their capacity to support human health as food productivity is reduced and food shortages become chronic.

66. Many countries affected by desertification live under constant health threats as their population faces food shortages, famine and starvation. Even without famine and starvation, malnutrition is widespread, with serious consequences for the health and productivity of the affected people, particularly the young. Improving the health of people in drylands depends critically on increased agriculture productivity and rural economic development.

67. By virtue of prevailing poverty and gender differences, the youth become easy victims of a number of major health concerns that include smoking, sexual and reproductive problems, HIV/AIDS, and drug abuse (UNDESA, 2005).

68. The global HIV/AIDS pandemic has not spared young people, and they continue to be devastated by it. Young people now account for half of all new HIV cases, and 25 per cent of people living with HIV are under 25 years of age (UNFPA, 2005). The situation is even more grave in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 63 per cent of HIV positive people are 15 - 24 years old, and more than 80 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS are less than 30 years old (UNFPA, 2005).

69. Young people are vulnerable to HIV infection because they form a large percentage of high-risk groups in high-risk settings. In several Asian countries, for example, more than 60 per cent of sex

workers are young people, and in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, an estimated 25 per cent of those who inject drugs are less than 20 years old (UNFPA, 2005).

70. Drug abuse is another important youth health concern; young people are starting to drink at earlier ages, and cannabis is the most widely and frequently used drug among young people (UNDESA, 2005; UNFPA, 2005). Alcohol use among young people has serious consequences not only in terms of created prospects of alcohol dependency, but also because of the increased likelihood of alcohol-related injuries later in life.

E. Desertification, young people and conflict

71. Conflicts over natural resources often lie at the heart of wars and civil strife. The vast majority of contemporary violent conflicts over the use of natural resources occur in the developing world, most often in the least developed countries. Unsustainable environmental practices pose increasing threats to the Earth's water, forests, climate, biodiversity, food and energy supply.

72. There is ample evidence for correlations between rural poverty, desertification in rural areas, discriminated access to resources and violent conflicts. These often coincide with political instability, primarily in least developed countries and countries with medium development characterized by poor state performance and unstable political conditions. Many of these conflicts are protracted, internal and brutal on the civilian population. More than 72 countries were identified in 2003 as unstable, and 50 million people were displaced by conflict (UNDESA, 2005). Conflict (whatever its form) is often both a cause and effect of poverty (World Bank, 2006).

73. Conflicts over the use of natural resources usually have multiple causes, including political, environmental degradation (for example, depletion of resources through general environmental degradation, desertification and deforestation) and the socio-economic (for example, land-use changes, agriculture, mineral and resource exploitation, and ethnic issues). Resource depletion may trigger population migrations, which can lead to conflicts.

74. By impoverishing the natural potential of the ecosystems, desertification increases the risk of conflicts between ethnic groups, families and individuals. Individuals, households, communities, populations or nations may fight over communal resources or perhaps transboundary resources, but resources depletion or degradation may also produce more subtle disparities in welfare that may lead to a kind of conflict that appears to bear little relation to environmental causation.

75. The relationship between desertification and violent conflict has been found to be cyclical in some cases. People affected by desertification develop survival strategies that often lead to further over-exploitation of accessible natural resources, and this in turn helps to aggravate desertification, generating conflicts and retarding development.

76. At the regional level, conflict causes refugee problems and increases the burden on health care systems. Furthermore, refugees spread diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. The economic costs of conflict are also worth noting, because it can result in reduced investment and economic growth in neighbouring countries.

77. Civil wars are at the root of three major social challenges, namely, drugs, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and international terrorism (World Bank, 2006). An estimated 95 per cent of drug production occurs in countries fighting civil wars because it is much easier to produce drugs in areas that are not controlled by any recognized government. It is for this reason that countries like Colombia and Afghanistan account for large proportions of global drug production. Afghanistan, for example, is reported to produce up to 87 per cent of the global opium output, in no small way because of the prevailing conflict situation there (UNODC, 2005).

F. Education

78. Education is the key to unlocking the potential in every individual, and ensuring the development of society. Education enables people to lift themselves out of poverty and to take care of themselves, their families and, most importantly, their future. Given that young people are the key to the future of humanity, the level and quality of their education is perhaps the most important

determinant of the wealth and welfare of our future. It is for this reason that in the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), education was the first in a list of 10 priority areas for youth development, and many countries have constitutional guarantees of the right to education (UNDESA, 2005).

79. Good progress has been made in the education sector since 1995, and the current generation of young people is considered the best educated so far (UNDESA, 2005). However, the negative effects of desertification tend to undermine these achievements, as children from poor households tend to drop out from school to help support their families. Also, desertification has a gender dimension, with female children the worst affected. According to the United Nations Millennium Project, most regions are making progress towards the attainment of the primary education MDGs, although Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia still remain off track (United Nations Millennium Project, 2005a). Quality of education is a problem because many poor children in developing countries do not learn much in primary school.

80. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest primary school enrolment rate, even though it increased from 54 per cent in 1990 to 62 per cent in 2001/01 (United Nations Millennium Project, 2005b). In Asia, progress has been variable; West Asia (which includes many countries classified as being in the Middle East) and South Asia each had an increase in primary enrolment rates between 1990 and 2001, but the rest of Asia either stagnated or even suffered setbacks in progress towards the primary school enrolment MDGs. South Asia registered an increase in primary school enrolment rate from 73 per cent to 80 per cent between 1990 and 2000/02, but the increase was not enough to help the region attain the MDG targets. Furthermore, both East and South-East Asia recorded declines in primary school enrolment rates within the same period.

81. In contrast to the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa and most parts of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean fared much better in terms of primary school enrolment. These countries are on track towards attaining the MDGs, and specifically registered considerable increases in primary school enrolment rates between 1990 and 2001/02.

82. Irrespective of regional or national indicators, young people in drylands are especially disadvantaged when it comes to educational attainment, largely because of their peculiar circumstances such as severe lack of educational facilities and teachers, and poor quality of education. In Brazil, for example, the illiteracy rate among 7 to 14 year olds in the semi-arid region of the country was, at 36.3 per cent, twice the national average (Environment Ministry, 2004). Young people in drylands pay the price of this lack of education in terms of limited job opportunities, increased poverty and increased marginalization. At a macro-level, this lack of access to quality education also reduces the contribution young people in drylands make to national development.

83. The failure of many drylands countries to meet their MDGs is indicative of the challenges they face in trying to provide education to their citizenry. In addition, many countries suffer, or are recovering, from conflict or civil strife, and so the challenge of building peace is a huge hindrance to providing education to young people.

84. Environmental education is an important aspect of education, particularly for young people in drylands. For this reason, the environment related proposals of the WPAY called for mainstreaming environmental education and training in school curricula and training programmes (UNDESA, 2005). This call was echoed by young people who, throughout the World Summit on Sustainable Development, called for a renewed commitment to education for sustainable development. The United Nations General Assembly declared 2005 – 2014 as a United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and called for the participation of youth in the implementation scheme of the decade.

85. Two examples of important efforts to increase the participation of youth in environmental conservation and in the fight against desertification are the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification educational kit on desertification, and the UNEP Tunza Youth Strategy. The UNESCO – UNCCD educational kit on desertification was produced to help educational institutions teach children and young people about desertification, and how they can help fight it (UNESCO – UNCCD, undated). It was produced in recognition of the fact that children are particularly receptive and have a spontaneous interest in nature and the environment. Children can thus serve on the frontlines of the fight against desertification if they are helped to better understand environmental problems, and if educational systems promote the idea of sustainable development.

86. The Tunza Youth Strategy was launched by UNEP in 2003 to involve young people in environmental conservation and sustainable development, and in the work of UNEP. Towards this end, an annual Tunza Youth International Conference is organized to enable young people to review progress towards the attainment of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and to review the role of youth in promoting sustainable development. In addition, various publications and a Tunza magazine are published. The latest edition of Tunza magazine was dedicated to the issue of deserts and drylands, with particular emphasis on the role of young people in the fight against desertification.

87. Youth empowerment and capacity building, which are so important in the fight against desertification, are especially so in the area of knowledge management and technology transfer. Although much progress has been made in such areas as improving farm productivity, irrigation and soil conservation, many poor countries, especially those in Africa, are yet to benefit from this progress (UNCCD, 2005b). Furthermore, attention should be given to marrying traditional knowledge to advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) to meet the knowledge needs of local communities. Such an effort would be important in helping to build knowledge management capacity, and thus in helping to promote sustainable and proactive environmental management. Young people have an especially important role to play in this regard, given that they are at the forefront of the ICT revolution. They should thus be given training in traditional knowledge, as well as in environmental management tools such as participatory poverty assessment, drought mitigation, and data collection and dissemination. These interventions should be done as much as possible in the context of South – South cooperation.

88. Against this background, it is encouraging that environmental education has increased steadily over the past decade or so, as shown by its inclusion in formal and non-formal education programmes, and by an increase in the number of professional associations of environmental educators (UNDESA, 2005). However, the challenge of translating environmental values into behavioural change, and hence the achievement of visible benefits from environmental education, still remains. For this reason, environmental education should emphasize the attainment of concrete changes if it is to have any real effect.

G. Access to land

89. Access to land is a specific aspect of the general problem of how to provide the 1.5 billion young people, 29 per cent of the population of less developed countries, with their fair share of natural resources. This issue is even more important in the poorest countries which have the highest proportions of young people in their populations (World Bank, 2006). The problem is well illustrated by the fact that about five sixths of all civil wars are caused by conflicts over natural resources. Natural resources have also been illegally exploited, and the proceeds used to finance civil wars.

90. Access to land is especially important in drylands given that they are generally of poor and/or marginal quality. Furthermore, various constituencies and user groups need access to drylands. Among these user groups are pastoralists, cultivators and farmers.

91. Youth access to land is an important issue in drylands for a variety of reasons. For example:

- (a) There is a strong correlation between incidence of poverty and access to land, as was found in India (Mearns, 1999). Where a lot of the land is often of marginal quality, access to adequate areas of land is of paramount importance to the survival of individuals and communities.
- (b) Providing young people with land can be an important step towards employment creation and poverty eradication. Ultimately, creating quality jobs for young people, and eradicating poverty from their ranks, will serve to improve personal lives and guarantee security. Conversely, the lack of jobs and extreme poverty among young people make an explosive mixture that can lead to instability (UNOWA, 2005).

92. Many young people and women are marginalized from the decision-making process. This has serious implications for the participation of youth and women in how their world is run, and how they go about trying to lead productive lives. The issue of access to land is perhaps the most glaring example of the impact of this marginalization on the lives of young people around the world.

V. OUR YOUTH, OUR FUTURE: OPPORTUNITIES AND SUCCESS STORIES

93. Although there is a paucity of data on young people in drylands, the foregoing discussion paints a picture of lives that are difficult, and lived in harsh conditions, amid many problems such as poverty, unemployment and threats of diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

94. To make matters worse, young people in drylands also have problems that militate against the resolution of their poverty and their ability to take on the many challenges they face. Thus, they often do not have access to education or land, are in conflict zones, or are leading lives of vulnerability and marginalization because they are migrants and/or young women. Despite the numerous problems, there are many opportunities for improving the lot of young people in drylands, as has been attested to by the many success stories from drylands around the world. This chapter presents some of these success stories.

A. Poverty

95. In the case of poverty, there are many success stories as evidenced by the fact that there were 130 million fewer people living in extreme poverty than there were, a decade earlier (United Nations Millennium Project, 2005b). Furthermore, the opportunities created by increased globalisation, and greater emphasis on poverty eradication, have helped reduce poverty.

96. Young people around the world are at the frontline of the fight against poverty, and are making important contributions towards the attainment of the MDGs. Youth involvement in the fight against poverty takes many forms, ranging from participation in poverty reduction strategy processes, to engaging in activities and programmes aimed at reducing poverty. The National Anti-Poverty Commission of the Philippines, for example, has embarked on an effort to increase youth participation in the fight against poverty, especially in terms of participation in the policy-formulation process (AHWG, 2005).

97. A UNESCO life skills project for rural women in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan targets adolescent girls, and works with local youth organizations on project monitoring and evaluation (AHWG, 2005). The project combines basic education with skills training and microcredit facilities, and helps reduce extreme poverty among adolescent girls. The approach used has been found to be highly effective in helping build capacities of youth organizations.

98. Properly managed and adequately resourced volunteer service programmes can provide an excellent channel for the involvement of young people in poverty eradication initiatives. Examples of programmes that have successfully mobilized youth in poverty alleviation to combat desertification and to rehabilitate degraded land are the environment youth corps in Cape Verde, Gambia and Lesotho. In Cape Verde, young community volunteers were mobilized through youth centres at district level and trained in environmental fields within a project run jointly by United Nations Volunteers, United Nations Development Programme and the UNCCD secretariat in order to lead awareness-raising campaigns on land degradation and other environmental issues. Some of these volunteers received microcredits for starting environmentally friendly businesses that will protect the environment and help reduce youth unemployment (UNCCD, 2006c). Gambia and Lesotho have also launched environment youth corps to reduce youth unemployment, and help protect the environment.

99. Other examples of poverty alleviation projects in drylands are the Community-based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Programme of Namibia, and the Indo-German Watershed Development Programme in the State of Maharashtra, India (WRI, 2005b). The CBNRM programme of Namibia is one of the most successful and largest such endeavours in the world, and has helped increase income and reduce poverty in beneficiary communities. At the heart of the CBNRM programme are community-managed conservancies covering parts of State communal areas. Communities have to meet certain criteria (e.g. setting up a committee, and preparing a constitution) to qualify for a conservancy which, once granted, enables the communities to exploit game there. The animals are either consumed by the community, or sold to trophy hunters, thus generating revenue. The CBNRM programme has been highly successful, with the number of conservancies approved increasing from 4 in 1998 to 31 (with 31,000 registered members) by 2004. Furthermore, total benefits

reached about USD 2.5 million, and conservancy-related activities generated almost 4,000 full- and part-time jobs. Women have also benefited from the CBNRM programme, filling more than half the full-time jobs, and showing strong participation in the committees, making up 50 per cent of members in one conservancy committee and 30 per cent in another.

100. In India too, substantial gains have been made in reducing poverty among young people in drylands, as exemplified by the IGWDP, (WRI, 2005b), which is being implemented in one of the most drought-prone districts of the State of Maharashtra by an NGO, in partnership with a government bank. The participatory watershed development projects funded by the IGWDP were implemented in villages that agree to temporarily ban tree cutting and grazing on lands they designate for regeneration. Villagers also contribute free labour, and agree to cover part of the project's costs.

101. In return, villagers were trained in soil and water conservation techniques, and a village watershed committee of local residents makes and implements decisions. The villages also entered into an agreement with the State Forest Department to have a joint forest management programme that gave local people the right to work on state-owned common lands, and to own the agricultural produce they grew there. Regeneration activities were carried out by the villagers, including planting trees and grassland, as well as sustainable crop production, and use of simple water harvesting and irrigation systems. The programme's benefits were substantial, including an increase in the area under irrigation and increased fodder for livestock. In addition, household and personal incomes rose, as evidenced by the increased ownership of such items as motorcycles, bicycles and television sets. The programme also helped reduce women's household labour, although on the whole they work more hours because watershed activities were year round, instead of being seasonal. The programme also proved sustainable because the benefits and activities continued even after funding from the IGWDP ended.

102. One important aspect of poverty among young people in drylands is the lack of access to productive resources such as land, and to finance. For this reason, microcredit facilities offer young people another opportunity to fight poverty in drylands. Uganda, for example, launched a Poverty Alleviation Action Project in 1994 to fight poverty among vulnerable and impoverished communities in the country, and targeted women, orphans and young people (Kanyenze et al, 2000). The project provided microcredit for income- and employment-generating activities such as small-scale farming, beekeeping and handicrafts. Four years after the establishment of the project, more than USD 10 million was disbursed, with a recovery rate of about 93 per cent. The project reached 23,877 beneficiaries, 20 per cent of whom were young people, and an independent evaluation of the project concluded that it had significantly reduced poverty.

103. These success stories have some common features that are worth bearing in mind in poverty-reduction efforts in drylands. First, meaningful community involvement is critical to success, as is effective partnership building between government agencies and other stakeholders. Furthermore, it is often easier to make an impact on incomes and livelihoods than on the rights of poor people and power relations in society, although these too can change over time. Finally, progress made on one front can sometimes cause problems in other respects, an indication of the complex nature of the task of achieving human development.

B. Youth unemployment

104. Youth unemployment is another concern with attendant opportunities. The fact that development agencies are committed to tackling the problem of youth unemployment is a positive development. In particular, the formation of the Youth Employment Network by international development and finance organizations such as the World Bank and the International Labour Organization presents an opportunity for better mobilization of resources and coordination of efforts. In addition, there has been a growth in job-creation programmes, as well as enterprise development, and microfinance programmes (Kanyenze et al, 2000). All these factors have helped create an enabling atmosphere for reducing youth unemployment.

105. For many young people in developing countries, involvement in volunteer schemes is the first exposure they have to a work environment. The skills, experience and workplace contacts that may be acquired through volunteering can contribute to enhancing the employability of young people. In Niger, for example, national volunteers working to build the capacity of municipalities were then integrated into the local governance structure.

106. South Africa and Egypt are two countries with fairly successful job-creation programmes (Kanyenze et al, 2000). South Africa launched a Community Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP) in 1994 to reduce unemployment and to train and educate beneficiaries. The primary target beneficiaries of the CBPWP were the “poorest of the poor”, women and the youth. CBPWP consisted of 599 projects mostly situated in, and employing people in, some of the poorest areas of the country, and was rated as the best job-creation programme in 30 countries in Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. The CBPWP has created an estimated 1.4 million work days, with most participants being employed on a short-term basis. Although the CDPWP has been successful in many respects, it has been plagued by practical difficulties such as ensuring that its female beneficiaries are not outnumbered by male counterparts. Also, there has been a lack of rigorous monitoring and evaluation, so it has been difficult to ascertain the successes and failures of the programme.

107. Egypt established a job-creation programme in 1991 to provide jobs to young people in poor areas (Kanyenze et al, 2000). The project also aims at reducing long-term unemployment, providing workers with new skills, and creating permanent jobs for school leavers. The project covers productive and social infrastructure such as irrigation schemes, restoration of public buildings and provision of potable water systems. Key best practices of the project include working with local authorities and local communities to identify potential projects, spending at least 25 per cent of project budget on labour, and insisting that at least half of the labourers used are locally recruited. The success of the project is indicated by the fact that more than 42,000 jobs were created by 1997, although the cost per job was considered too high.

C. Access to land

108. Access to land is an important issue in many countries, and has often caused wars and civil strife. The issue is especially important in drylands given the poor quality of land in these areas, and increasing demands on land resources. Despite the difficulties, there are opportunities that can help ease problems of access to land in drylands. Advances in information and communication technologies, and the increasing realization of the importance of access to land, all offer opportunities for increasing young people's access to land.

109. One success story is the effort by an Ethiopian organization, the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), to provide young people with access to land (Utviklingsfondnet, undated). REST is a local organization working to fight food insecurity, reverse environmental degradation and reduce youth unemployment. Towards this end, REST established soil and water conservation structures on hillside land, and then distributed the land to landless young people. The project was aimed at providing landless young people with income generating and conservation activities such as tree planting, beekeeping and the construction of soil and water conservation structures, while at the same time contributing to halting soil and land degradation. The whole community provided the labour for the construction of the soil and water structures, and youth groups developed bylaws on various aspects of the management of the project.

110. Young people benefited immensely from the project. Beneficiaries obtained land ownership certificates, thus motivating them to develop the land and increase its sustainability. Young people were also able to support their families while staying in their communities rather than migrating to urban areas. All this was possible because of the income and other products obtained from the project; beneficiaries were able to earn an average of about USD 110 – 150 per person per year from the sale of eucalyptus, honey and grass. Shrubs also provided firewood and material for fencing.

111. Despite the many benefits, the REST project had a number of challenges, such as increasing demand for land even though there was a shortage of land for distribution. The project also provided some valuable lessons such as the need to build the capacity of youth groups, build partnerships with NGOs and local groups, and target young people to reduce rural –urban migration.

D. Environmental services

112. A special segment of the Bamako conference will dwell on how young people can be engaged in making a difference, using reforestation/afforestation as an example. The session is intended to demonstrate how reforestation/afforestation goes beyond offsetting greenhouse gas

emissions by providing numerous avenues to improve security and economic development in degraded areas.

113. Major environmental challenges include deforestation, soil degradation and desertification, declining biodiversity and marine resources, water scarcity and deteriorating water and air quality. Urbanization is an emerging issue, bringing with it the range of human health and environmental problems well-known in urban areas throughout the world. Growing 'environmental debts' in many countries are a major concern because the cost of remedial action will be far greater than that of preventive action.

114. Consequently, young people have a major role to play in managing the environment and returning economic benefits at the same time. The role of young people and youth volunteering in tree planting is an example. Trees protect nutrient-rich top-soil from being carried away by wind and water erosion. As such they are a vital instrument in the fight against landslides and desertification.

115. Trees also have the important capacity to completely revitalize areas where farming is currently impossible due to a high concentration of salt in the ground (for example, in Aral Sea basin). Over the years, trees absorb the salt from the soil, making the earth usable again and providing impoverished regions with renewed economic productivity and diversified income from agriculture.

116. Planting trees and managing them in a sustainable manner gives local, and perhaps marginalized, communities employment opportunities. Trees can be planted on the smallest tracts of land, thereby involving smallholders and peasant farmers, women and young people who get paid for the value of the carbon the trees are storing for as long as the trees are kept, for the fruits the trees might bear, and for other forestry products.

117. Planting local tree species will increase the diversity and amount of wildlife in an area, adding to the ability of the local ecosystem to sustain life. Equally, by promoting biodiversity for all to enjoy, transboundary activities in the area can serve as confidence-building measures between conflicting states.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

118. This background paper serves as a primer and advocacy tool on the issue of youth and desertification. It also provides a global perspective on the issue, reviews the challenges faced and the opportunities that exist in these various areas of concern, and presents a number of success stories.

119. The paper also discusses a number of issues that are of concern to young people in drylands, namely poverty, unemployment, education, migration, health, conflicts and access to land. Although important progress has been made in the fight against poverty, there is still a lot of work to do given that people in many parts of the world, especially in drylands, still live in abject poverty. In this regard, the issue of youth unemployment is especially significant because unemployment is a major hindrance to poverty alleviation, and can lead to conflict and migration, and fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS.

120. In light of the mixed record of success towards attaining development objectives in many of these areas of concern, the following recommendations can be made:

- (a) Include the youth and desertification agenda in:
 - (i) International consultations, e.g. the High-level Dialogue on Migration planned for later this year at the United Nations;
 - (ii) Land tenure reforms;
- (b) Create enabling policy and legislative environments for youth development. Two approaches can be used: bottom up (where legislative and policy frameworks are locally initiated), or top-down (where international treaties and conventions are implemented locally);

- (c) Work with young people, youth groups and advocates for youth interests. Such an approach will help increase ownership of efforts, help young people in the drylands, and help to ensure the sustainability of any resulting benefits. Examples of international youth groups and organizations include the Youth Employment Network, TakingITGlobal, the Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS, and the Tunza Youth Strategy of UNEP;
- (d) Build and strengthen partnerships with the private sector and NGOs in increasing the involvement of young people in the fight against desertification.
- (e) Support volunteer service schemes that are targeted at young people and that provide them with opportunities to contribute to development, as well as options for enhancing their prospects to enter the labour market;
- (f) Encourage countries to enhance the participation of young people in the elaboration and implementation of the UNCCD national action programmes at local, regional and national levels;
- (g) Form a youth network in drylands. Such a network can provide a global platform for young people in drylands and should have thematic groups around major areas of concern (e.g. gender, health);
- (h) Advocate more resources and capacity building for young people in drylands. It is going to take an estimated USD 73 billion in 2006, and USD 135 billion in 2015, in financial support towards the attainment of the MDGs in low-income countries (United Nations Millennium Project, 2005a). Clearly, a lot of resources are needed, and what little there is, will be fought over. For this reason, it will be important to advocate resources commensurate with the task of ensuring that young people in drylands live productive, healthy lives;
- (i) UNCCD should have a focal point for youth. This will be of tremendous help, especially before a fully operational global youth network in drylands is established;
- (j) Expedite and facilitate the implementation of the UNCCD in various countries by:
 - (i) Giving priority to drylands in both national and international political agendas;
 - (ii) Increasing the role of young people in the fight against desertification, and in the formulation and implementation of national and regional action plans.
- (k) Ensure that the rights of young people, especially young women, in drylands are respected. In this regard, a rights-based approach to development should be used in drylands. Young people should be enabled to claim their rights, and relevant authorities should be supported in discharging the duties implied by these rights.

VII. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBNRM	Community-based Natural Resources Management Programme
HDI	Human Development Index
HPI	Human Poverty Index
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IGWDP	Indo-German Watershed Development Programme
ILO	International Labour Organization
INCD	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
IYDD	International Year of Deserts and Desertification
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
REST	The Relief Society of Tigray
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNOWA	United Nations Office for West Africa
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
WHO	World Health Organization
WPAY	World Programme of Action for Youth
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

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