



## ***New UN study links trees in drylands with sustainable development***

19 July 2016 – For the first time, a new United Nations report details the number of trees, forests and how the land is used in the world’s drylands, and the findings could be used to track progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and help fight climate change.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) issued the preliminary findings of the first ever statistical sampling-based assessment of land use in the world’s drylands.

Using freely available satellite images and a newly developed survey method, FAO found that drylands cover about 41% of the world’s land surface – an area twice the size of Africa. Of that land, 1.1 billion hectares are forest, accounting for more than one-quarter of the global forest area.



The leaves and fruit of trees are sources of food for people and fodder for animals; their wood provides fuel for cooking and heating and can be a source of income for poor households; trees protect soils, crops and animals from the sun and winds, while forests are often rich in biodiversity.

The UN agency cites recent studies that point to the need to restore drylands to better cope with the effects of drought, desertification and land degradation.

Drylands are divided into four aridity zones. The least arid of the four is the dry sub-humid zone, such as the Sudanian savanna in West Africa, the grasslands in South America, the steppes in southern Siberia and the Canadian prairie. Most dryland forests occur in this zone, as do some large irrigated, intensively farmed areas along perennial rivers.

At the other extreme, the driest is the hyper-arid zone, which is dominated by deserts, including the Sahara and the Arabian.

More than 200 experts with knowledge of the land and land uses in specific dryland regions conducted the assessment, which will be released in full later this year.

The FAO Global Drylands Assessment is expected to provide Governments, donors and other stakeholders in sustainable development with a valuable tool to guide policy-making and investments to aid people already threatened by climate change.

The baseline information is being already used for the baseline assessment and monitoring in the FAO-implemented project, “Action Against Desertification”, an initiative of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP).

It is expected to further enhance Governments’ abilities to track progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 15 on sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation and halting biodiversity loss.

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