

# EVENT REPORT

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

MULTINATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT POLICY  
DIALOGUE

JOHANNES HÜGEL

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## Land Degradation, Climate Change and Migration: Challenges for the EU and Africa

Land degradation is a global concern with far-reaching implications ultimately affecting the ability of land to provide food and income for people. Globally, a large portion of the vulnerable human populations – the rural poor – live on degrading and less-favoured agricultural lands without market access, a fact that leads to an increase in their overall poverty rate. This will have further impacts on the ongoing worldwide migration movement.

By 2030 experts estimate a significant increase in demands for energy, food and water which will further aggravate this situation. Being aware of these challenges the United Nations have given priority to combatting land degradation and aim at land degradation neutrality by 2030 (SDG 15.3).

The EU is impacting land degradation through consumption and production processes outside its borders and is itself affected by land degradation (mainly due to soil erosion, soil contamination and soil sealing), with risks of worsening due to climate change.

An expert debate in the European Parliament on “Land Degradation, Climate Change and Migration: Challenges for the EU and Africa” raised awareness of these problematic developments. Invited by the hosts of the event, the Chair for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, Giovanni La Via and

the Chair of the Committee on Development, Linda McAvan, the jointly by Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the European Commission’s department for land use and management organized expert debate discussed various aspects of the nexus, focusing on how the SDG on land degradation neutrality can also be integrated within the EU.

How can the link between land degradation, climate change and migration be broken? How can the European Union and Africa enhance collaboration to address these issues?

The different high-level speakers from international institutions, amongst them the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Economics on Land Degradation Initiative (ELD), agreed on the importance to focus on root causes of the interlinked challenges of the migration, land degradation and climate change nexus and therefore to promote a better land use and management in general.

The recent international migration flows worldwide and with more than 207.000 migrants this year coming into Europe only by June 2016 is the consequence of a multidimensional problem, land degradation being the most important

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factor in the play. Between 2006 and 2010 about 1 million people were forced out of their land to cities, the Sahel being one of the most vulnerable regions with 85% land already considered as degraded and more than 40% of the people living there with less than 1,25 dollars per day. The tension in the region becomes visibly problematic with 7.5 million people migrating to the area of Lake Chad.

In this regard Ms Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) stressed the need to focus on poverty and environmental factors – land degradation amongst others being the mayor factor – because all of them trigger instability and migration.

Most of the irregular migration into Europe comes from vulnerable drylands, and worldwide, up to 135 million people are estimated to be at risk of being forced to migrate as a result of pressures associated with land degradation and desertification. Ms Barbut pointed out that only a common international effort, especially of European and African institutions, to making land healthy and productive again, will make a difference. She therefore pledges for promoting a joint initiative on land rehabilitation within the commitment that European and African countries have given to achieve land degradation neutrality as part of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. A positive economic narrative would be possible in the Sahel and West Africa with a strengthened collaboration between the European Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

His Excellency Jonas Hemou, Ambassador of Economic Community of West African States to the European Union also insisted that land degradation is the mayor problem

for migration in the Sahel and the West African regions. In West African countries 60% of the people live in rural areas and a huge part of these areas are degraded lands. These people are often forced to leave their land in search for productive areas. Most of them, so the Ambassador, would like to stay in their homelands, and only as ultima ratio they would opt to emigrate to other regions. He stressed the need to look at regional perspectives and regular approaches to tackle the problem. All this could be managed for example through agricultural policy, migration policy and the Sahel strategy within the work of ECOWAS, which could be assisted by EU financing.

Such funding could be provided through the Emergency Trust fund launched at the EU-Africa Migration summit in La Valletta in 2015. As suggested by Roberto Ridolfi, Director for Sustainable Growth and Development of the European Commission, another source of funding should be the EU Official Donor Assistance. As example he mentioned a successful grant of 26 million EUR that just had been approved for projects managing flows of migrants and long term resilience.

The economic approach in this regard definitely plays an important role in view of successful perspectives on land degradation and the Sustainable Development Goals. Across Sub-Saharan Africa more than 300 million hectares of land are suitable for land rehabilitation. But unfortunately mayor investments to rehabilitate land are scarce, despite positive side effects like storage of water or a high return on investments.

Mark Schauer from the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative explained how this can be evidenced by the initiative that brings

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economic approaches on land degradation and SDGs. Land degradation is not only agriculture, but there are much more economic values behind, notably with the ecosystem services. Investments in the rehabilitation of lands definitely will pay off and is a best practice option on the way to land degradation neutrality.

With regards to best practice examples of tackling the issue of land degradation the Lake Chad Basin Project and the Great Green Wall Initiative were highlighted. The objective of the Lake Chad Basin Project is to achieve global environmental benefits through concentrated management of the naturally integrated land and water resources of the basin. The Green Wall Initiative is a pan-African joint venture to battle desertification, aiming at tackling poverty and land degradation in the Sahel-Saharan region. These examples show how effective development collaboration can become. The speakers agreed to call on the different partners from Europe and Africa to strengthen their common efforts to achieve the SDG goal on land degradation neutrality through more financial aid for land rehabilitation projects and a better land use and management.