

Appeal of the Director of Environment on World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) 2016

The World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) is observed worldwide on 17 June every year. The theme of this year's WDCD is **“Inclusive cooperation for achieving Land Degradation Neutrality”** and the Slogan is **“Protect Earth. Restore Land. Engage People”** the 2016 WDCD addresses the importance of comprehensive participation and cooperation in working towards achieving Land Degradation Neutrality.

The objectives of the 2016 WDCD are to:

- (1) A change in our land use practices through smart agriculture and adaptation to changing climate, especially in the dry fragile parts of the world where food shortages are becoming more and more severe.
- (2) Access to technology and land rights for small holder farmers who safeguard the environment and meet the food needs of millions of households, especially among the poorest households
- (3) A balance in the land use for ecology and consumption, drawing on the best practices
- (4) More investments in sustainable land practices so that sustainable food systems become the normal practice and
- (5) More effective action on desertification whose effects on security, peace and stability are invisible yet real for the affected countries due especially to food and water scarcity and environmentally forced migration.

The call this year is to recognize that we all face the same challenges and are connected and united by our common goal of a sustainable and prosperous life for all on this planet. Whether it is to organize clean up campaigns, food waste reduction initiatives, walk-to-work days, plastic bans, art exhibits, tree-planting drives, concerts, dance recitals, recycling drives, social media campaigns and different contests - every action counts. When multiplied by a global chorus, our individual voices and actions become exponential in its impact.

The Department of Environment, Government of Tamil Nadu is the Pioneer in creating Environmental awareness in the State. The Department of Environment is the nodal agency for implementing the National Green Corps (NGC) under the Government of India funding, in 8000 schools in all 32 District at the rate of 250 School per District and in addition about 8000 schools are covered under the State funded Eco clubs scheme. These programmes mainly aim at awareness creation among school children and public through various activities such as tree planting, rallies, herbal gardening etc. The NGC coordinators have already been trained to inculcate the concept of recycling in school children. Many schools follow the simple practice of vermi-composting their food wastes.

The main objectives of this programme is to create awareness about their immediate environment and impart knowledge about the eco-systems, their inter-dependence and their need for survival, through visits and demonstrations and to mobilise youngsters by instilling in them the spirit of scientific inquiry into environmental problems and involving them in the efforts of environmental preservation. The school students are also involved in various awareness creation activities. The awareness campaign are through all possible media like print media, local cable television, visible display boards / paintings, rallies etc.

On this **World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD)**, I urge all to take responsibility for environmental sustainability and social equality. The current global population of seven billion is expected to grow to nine billion by 2050, but the number of hungry people need not increase. By preventing desertification through planting trees, conserving forest area, rainwater harvesting, creating conducive environment for pollinators and seed dispersers, avoid releasing polluted water in open areas etc., we will be taking the first step towards a world where no one will be hungry.

I once again urge all citizens to join us to achieve this years theme.