

### **Press Release**

The World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) is celebrated every year on 17th June. The theme of this year's WDCD is ecosystem-based adaptation with the slogan 'Land Belongs to the Future, Let's Climate Proof It'. The 2014 WDCD highlights the benefits of mainstreaming sustainable land management policies and practices into our collective response to climate change.

On the occasion, Shri Prakash Javadekar, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India highlighted desertification, loss of biodiversity and climate change as the greatest challenges to sustainable development. Shri Javadekar mentioned that the loss of grasslands and forest cover are the principal cause of land degradation as they make soil vulnerable to wind and water erosion. The Hon'ble Minister said that although the available estimates on the extent of land degradation/desertification in the country are a cause of grave concern, this can be stopped or reverted through collective efforts made by the people.

In 2012, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the world leaders recognized Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD) as a serious global challenge impeding sustainable development and agreed towards an aspirational goal for achieving a land-degradation neutral world. In this spirit, the Hon'ble Minister cited his experience of working in 11 watersheds in the State of Maharashtra in order to emphasize that India can strive to become Land Degradation Neutral by 2030 with collective efforts of the various Ministries, the people and other stakeholders. He said that this goal can be achieved if the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Water Resources and stakeholders work tirelessly toward this end. The Hon'ble Minister strongly believes that the people of India need to work together to achieve the overarching and aspirational goal of achieving land degradation neutrality.

On the occasion, Hon'ble Minister released a short documentary on Sustainable Land and Ecosystem management (SLEM) project in India prepared by Indian Council for Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) and also felicitated Mr. Jadav Payeng from Assam, Mr. Ranaram Bishnoi from Rajasthan and the Foundation for Ecological Security, an organization based in Gujarat, for their outstanding contributions in restoring degraded land and ecosystems.

The event was organized in New Delhi by the Desertification Cell of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in association with ICFRE.