

**Statement by
David Cooper
Acting Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity
World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought
17 June 2023
Theme: “Her Land. Her Rights.”**

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“We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back.”

This succinct statement by Malala Yousafzai highlights the importance of the theme for this year’s celebration of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought “Her Land. Her Rights.”

Women are often the most affected by land degradation and desertification. Land is the most critical economic resource for most rural people. Lack of ownership and control over land by women around the world exposes them to poverty, hunger, gender-based violence, and displacement. Women are often excluded from land registration and ownership systems, making them vulnerable to eviction and land grabbing.

This must change. We must urgently address the challenges that limit women's access to secure land tenure, including discriminatory laws and policies, cultural norms and practices, access to information and resources, and lack of representation in decision-making processes.

Since the ability to own and control land is essential for women’s economic empowerment and social status, we need women’s land rights to achieve true equality. Women who own and control land are better able to provide for their families, secure their livelihoods, and invest in their communities, leading to improved health and education outcomes. They are also more likely to engage in sustainable land use practices that conserve biodiversity and protect ecosystems.

Women's land rights are therefore essential for achieving the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Framework emphasizes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and is supported by a dedicated Gender Plan of Action. The Framework’s human rights-based approach, including support for the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, reinforces the potential for transformative action.

By prioritizing women's land rights, we can achieve more equitable and sustainable outcomes for all and build a future of life in harmony with nature.
