

# Desertification, a Condition That Involves People, Soil And the Ways of Being in the World

André Francisco Pilon  
University of São Paulo / International Academy of Science, Health & Ecology  
[gaiarine@usp.br](mailto:gaiarine@usp.br)

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification unites governments, scientists, policymakers, private sector and communities around a shared vision and global action to restore and manage the world's land for the humanity's future and the planet.

The Convention is a multilateral commitment to mitigating today's impacts of land degradation and advancing tomorrow's land stewardship in order to provide food, water, shelter and economic opportunity to all people in an equitable and inclusive manner.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties, taking place in Côte d'Ivoire, will count with environment ministers, private sector and civil society representatives in view of the global land restoration agenda, future-proof land use and tackle the growing impacts of drought.

After more than three decades of scientific reports and international meetings, it is clear that there is no consistent progress towards an integrated worldwide approach in the public and private arena to climate change, to food insecurity, and access to non-pollutant fuels.

How to involve and motivate decision-makers in choosing the right paths, in the face of the overwhelming pressures from political and economic groups? Would scientific reports be enough to drive effective public policies, given the usual ways of dealing with things?

As a global community, the world can no longer rely on incremental reforms within traditional planning and development frameworks to address the profound environmental challenges facing human survival, which intertwine economic, political and cultural issues.

"Development" and "growth", profit-making, rarely contemplates relevant aspects of well-fare and well-being; "progress", directed by political and economic actors, hardly implies a change in power asymmetries between common people and business corporations.

Public policies, advocacy, communication, research and teaching programs, should address the general phenomenon, the current "world-system", with its boundaries, structures, techno-economic paradigms, support groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence.

The majority of the world population lacks the conditions to thrive as human beings: judicial support, public health, sanitation, education, security, conviviality spaces, green areas, adequate food, transparency and social spaces for enlightened political participation.

Forests, savannas, watersheds, biodiversity and habitats are threatened by commodities, logging, mining, and wildfires. The world is still emitting an unsustainable amount of CO<sub>2</sub> through heavy industry, electricity, agriculture, transport and buildings (built-up areas).

Indigenous peoples and local communities are proven land stewards and preservation of their rights and involvement are vital in the management of territories. However, they face the power of the "establishment", of "productivity paradigms", for the sake of profit.

An ecological civilization forms human beings, not consumers for the market-place; it cares for the preservation of the cultural heritage and essential components of the quality of life, such as the aesthetical and ethical aspects for thriving like human beings.

Collective action and interventions, for an equitable, just and enduring future, should engage civil society, conservation units, the media, journalists, faith leaders, advocates, experts, decision makers, activists, young people, political leaders, organizations.

The issue goes beyond technological solutions, of choosing the right tool and the best information; it includes the contexts in which policy makers operate from the perspective of the dilemmas and contradictions in the goals and values embodied in the current systems.

Machine tools, “artificial” intelligence, the hegemony of technological and technocratic solutions in all realms of life actually obscures the need for a holistic, integrative and transformative ecosystem approach encompassing all dimensions of being in the world.

Michael Crow, of Arizona State University, says that climate change is not a scientific issue, but largely a behavioral issue; to redress the wrongs of our categorically wrong views, it is necessary a transdisciplinary education, contrariwise a hierarchy of knowledge.

Prof. Crow explicitly condemns chemical structures and manufacturing techniques which are building, with the backing of academicians, thousands of molecules that cause cancer, as they relinquish to others the solution of all the problems they create for public health.

Effects of micro and nanotechnology, ultra-processed food, genetic transformations, electromagnetic radiation, are currently under scrutiny by international organisms, in view of the criteria of toxicity and action on human health and the environment.

A global constituency calls for culture as the fourth pillar of development and has urged public authorities to integrate culture into the global agenda, in view of the social-ecological interdependence and its contribution to environmental values.

Authentic and enlightened decisions are urgently needed to face the dominant paradigms of power, wealth, development, growth and freedom, which actually accounts for the many problems of difficult settlement or solution in our disrupted world.

The recovery of the Earth and the recovery of mankind are paired aspects, and must be tackled simultaneously, in space and time, for their mutual support. This implies a fundamental change in the ways current problems are defined and addressed.

This implies defining and paying attention to the problems in light of the complementary dimensions (intimate, interactive, social and biophysical), as they combine to elicit, maintain, or transform the conditions to live better in a better world.

Strait full participation, both on the world stage and at home, is not only required, but is fundamental for the definition and responsible treatment of the complex problems that combine environmental, political, economic, educational and cultural factors.

Public policies, private sectors should contribute in unison to achieve the objectives set by international *fora*, in view of legislation and the jurisprudence of the courts, avoiding customary maneuvers or subterfuges to escape obligations and statute duties.

Special attention must be given to the systems of production and consumption, to local communities, indigenous areas, forest cover and soil, water quality, nowadays exposed by mining, pesticides, monocultures, desertification and loss of biodiversity.

Institutional capacity, judicial neutrality, transparent information, social spaces for enlightened discussion about public policies are fundamental for change, in light of accountability, public scrutiny and reliable and independent information bodies.