

All over the world we are seeing the negative impacts that desertification and land degradation have on the well being of communities and biodiversity.

In my own country of Colombia, which is the second most bio-diverse country on earth, high rates of deforestation are causing land degradation and the extinction of many plants and animals. Along with biodiversity loss, the social and economic livelihoods of forest dependant people, often indigenous peoples, are being rapidly destroyed. If deforestation continues as it is, Colombia's woodlands could be completely depleted in a matter of 40 years.

Indigenous women have been particularly impacted in Colombia losing the very land on which they survive.

The same is true for women around the world living in areas affected by desertification and land degradation and drought. While there have been massive migrations in many areas because of desertification, it is often found that women are left behind in these resource barren areas caring for children, sick and elderly, while men migrate to other areas for a better life.

This has been documented in Mali, where over the past 20 years almost half of the male population has migrated to neighboring countries. In areas affected by desertification women are spending four hours collecting necessities including water, fuelwood and fodder, instead of what should take, at the most, one hour. Some studies have shown that in areas affected by desertification women's working hours exceed that of men by 30 hours per week.

From its inception the UNCCD has recognized the importance of women's particular needs and role in combating desertification, and in involving both women and men in all levels of decision-making. Now, with rapid loss of biodiversity, significant decreases in freshwater resources and increases in food insecurity, it is ever more critical to put the words of the Convention into action.

Under the guidance of the decisions of CCD COP-9, and in line with the CCD's 10-year strategy, the Secretariat with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and support from Finland and Switzerland, has drafted a policy framework on gender. This framework demonstrates the benefits of mainstreaming gender in desertification and sustainable land management actions at national and local levels.

Implementation of this framework will, in fact, increase effectiveness of the work of the UNCCD Secretariat and its Parties to deliver the objectives of the 10-year strategy.

At UNCCD COP-10 Parties have the opportunity to adopt a framework that can simultaneously increase the effectiveness of combating desertification and achieve goals to-wards gender equality and women's empowerment. Parties can also support mainstreaming gender into their National Action Plans by agreeing to fund a gender specialist in the UCCD Secretariat. This will allow the UNCCD Secretariat to fully support Parties in gender mainstreaming the 10-year strategy.