

# Season's Greetings

## UNCCD CSO PANEL NEWSLETTER 2020

October/November/December 2020

*Dear Members of the Accredited CSOs to the UNNCD,*

*As 2020 draws to a close, we reflect on a difficult year that has brought many challenges to the way that we approach land and all environmental issues. The five members of the CSO panel, together with their constituents - the CSOs from the nations of the world, have helped lead the pandemic response in multiple ways including advising governments, researching the effects of Covid-19 on land conservation processes, building resilience to its impacts, hosting webinars, using lessons learnt, sharing successful CSO stories and working to strengthen capacity.*

*Looking forward to a brighter 2021, as a CSO Panel, we want to reaffirm our commitments to tackling desertification and land degradation for a healthier and more sustainable future for all. The contributions of each and every one of you is much appreciated, please do not hesitate to continue sharing your projects, success stories, initiatives, events and new publications with us.*

*Wishing you all a safe, peaceful and prosperous new year!*

Your CSO Panel

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### IN THE FOCUS

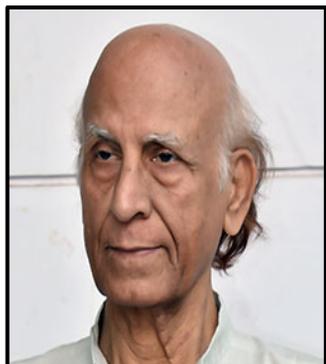


#### **CSO Panel welcomed the new Deputy Executive Secretary**

Following the announcement by the UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw on the new Deputy Executive Secretary back in July, [Dr Tina Birmpili](#) of Greece assumed office on 1 October 2020, replacing the outgoing Mr. Pradeep Monga of India. Pradeep Monga forged a good working relationship with civil society and we shall miss his positive presence at the UNCCD. Ms. Birmpili brings to the position over 25 years of experience in policy analysis and implementation on sustainable development related issues and management at all levels of governance. She is a former Executive Secretary of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, as well as the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change in Greece. Prior to joining the Ozone Secretariat in 2013, she served as Ambassador of Greece to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in Paris. Throughout her career, which included assignments with the Athens Development Agency, the Open University of Greece and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in different capacities, she has been engaged in issues related to environment and sustainable development.

Ms. Birmpili holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and a Master of Science (MSc) in Environmental Management and Economics from Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, London.

On 24 November Ms. Birmpili met with the CSO Panel members at the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Panel. The CSO representatives introduced themselves and their organizations to DES, and had a substantive discussion on their roles within the panel, prioritized actions, as well as the way forward.



**In memory of Bhawani Shanker Kusum - a mentor with a great heart who worked tirelessly to make a better world combating desertification and supporting rural development.**

The UNCCD CSO community deeply mourns the loss of Bhawani Shanker Kusum, President of [Gram Bharati Samiti](#) (GBS) of India, who passed away on Saturday, 14th November 2020. Our deepest condolences are with his family, friends and compatriots.

A close friend of the Convention and a recipient of the Award in the Field of Constructive Work - 2019, Mr. Bhawani was a member of CSO Panel together with Marioldy Sanchez Santivañez, Baris Karapinar, Sophiko Akhobadze and Hindou

Oumarou that initiated the work to address for the first time the issue of land tenure. He was also the Focal Point for the CSOs participation in the COP 14 in 2019.

Efforts of Mr. Bhawani Shanker Kusum in different fields of social service, particularly in rural Rajasthan has changed the lives of thousands of people afflicted by leprosy, the physically handicapped and also the poor rural and women of backward castes and tribes. Bhoodan land development for the Sahariya tribe, Padyatras for Gram Swaraj, non-formal education, people's rights, youth camps to stop liquor and smoking habits, healthcare and hygiene, cleanliness drive, propagating Gandhian values, etc. have been some of Mr. Kusum's Gandhian work in the initial years. He set up Gram Bharati Samiti in 1984 to carry out rural constructive work following the principles of Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. Mr. Kusum was encouraged to carry out meaningful rehabilitation work of the leprosy patients during one of his meetings with Baba Amte in 1987. He also sensitized and guided the rural poor women on the benefits of saving money and linked them to micro credit facilities, which has kindled a spirit of entrepreneurship in the women. Concerned about the problems of desertification and water conservation, Mr. Kusum initiated 'Gandhivan wasteland development project' wherein 25 hectares of wasteland in the Aravalli hill range is transformed to a forestland involving community participation and its outcome is a balanced eco system.



CSOs are really sad for the loss but very happy for having the opportunity to share all the beautiful moments with such an amazing and kind person.

He will be sorely missed.





INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF  
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES  
2021

FRUITS AND  
VEGETABLES,  
YOUR DIETARY  
ESSENTIALS.



## 2021 is the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables (IYFV)

Declared at the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly, the [International Year of Fruits and Vegetables 2021](#) is a unique opportunity to raise awareness on the important role of fruits and vegetables in human nutrition, food security and health and as well in achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals. In that respect, #IYFV2021 is meant to serve as a launchpad for the uptake of effective actions that will strengthen the role of smallholder and family farmers in sustainable farming and production. Such actions are expected to have a positive impact in reducing hunger and poverty, enhancing food and nutrition security, improving livelihoods, and contributing to better natural resource management.

## NEWS FROM THE REGIONS / CSO NETWORKS

### The oasis crisis

The threat to oasis ecosystems is both anthropogenic and ecological. Changing lifestyles, competition from globalization and the trend towards global warming are resulting in multiple attacks on the ecosystem, generating a crisis that puts at risk the survival of the populations living in the oasis within a few generations. This oasis crisis is characterized by the abandonment of traditional social practices and population pressure on limited resources.

The Associative Network for the Sustainable Development of Oasis ([RADD0](#)), coordinated by [CARI](#), has formulated recommendations for policy makers working in oasis territories. They are based on these five pillars of change:

- Promoting a territorial approach for a concerted development of oasis;
- Preserving the environment: biodiversity, waste management and sustainable energy production;
- Involving young oasis people to ensure the future of the oasis;
- Involving women for resilient oasis; Involving women for resilient oasis;
- Enhancing the value of oasis products for prosperous oasis.

Find the full document through the following link (in Arabic and French): <https://bit.ly/34os8EU>



On November 6<sup>th</sup>, an online roundtable discussion was held to mark the **International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict**.



November 6  
International Day for Preventing the  
Exploitation of the Environment  
in War and Armed Conflict

The roundtable was attended by representatives from the [IDEA](#) (CSO Panel member - Eastern Europe), Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Ministry of Education, Azerbaijan Youth Foundation, Child and Youth Development Center, Socio-Ecological Center "Ecosphere", media representatives as well as the young eco activists. The event aimed to raise awareness on destructive effects of war and conflict on the environment, by focusing on environmental crimes committed on the territories of Azerbaijan formerly occupied by Armenia, restoration processes of the damaged natural resources and involvement and potential role of the local youth in this process.



On November 11<sup>th</sup>, Azerbaijan joined Turkey in an annual **tree planting campaign** called "[Breath for the Future](#)". During the event, attended by Azerbaijani and Turkish officials and many volunteers, 11 thousand trees were planted on an 11-hectare area in the Khojasan settlement of Baku. It should be noted that on 12 November 2019, the Turkish campaign has broken the [Guinness World Records](#) for planting most saplings (303 150 trees) in an hour.



### Bison continue repopulating the mountains of Shahdag

In November, Ismayilli region of Azerbaijan welcomed 5 more bison from Europe, bringing the total number to 19. The initial herd of bison were released in May of 2019, and have since perfectly acclimated to the local environment and given birth to 3 calves. Overall, the giants of the forest have shown great signs of adaptation and coexistence, which makes [IDEA](#) and its partners (Ministry of Ecology and WWF Azerbaijan) beyond happy in carrying on with the project to ultimately establish a free-roaming bison population in the Caucasus: <https://bit.ly/38I923E>

### A long-wished plastic bag legislation is about to come into force in Azerbaijan

On November 20th, at the plenary session of Parliament, a ban on manufacturing, import and sale of polyethylene bags of up to 15 microns (to be imposed from 1 January 2021) and other single-use plastic utensils (to be imposed from 1 July 2021) was proposed during the discussion of a Draft Law on the Environmental Protection. After the enforcement of the regulation, only bags that meet the established standards will be produced, and that will play an irreplaceable role in tackling plastic waste - one of the biggest sustainability issues the world.



### Global Citizen Mexico Hero Award to Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda's founder

For the first time in Mexico, the recipient of the [Global Citizen Hero Award 2020](#) is Martha Isabel "Pati" Ruiz Corzo for her work in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, who was elected by a committee of judges, composed of Ninfa Salinas (President, Grupo Salinas Advisory Councils), Gemma Santana (Head of Sustainable Development in the

Office of the President of the Mexican Republic), the Government of Mexico City, Rodrigo Kuri (Executive Representative of Citibanamex), Celine Fernandez (Cartier Mexico & Amnesty International Board of Directors), and Alicia Lebrija (Executive President, Televisa Foundation) who selected her as the winner among the nominees, for the incredible work of [Grupo Ecológico SierraGorda](#).

**Martha Isabel "Pati" Ruiz Corzo**, an ecological activist, co-founded, [Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda \(GESG\)](#) in 1987 with the help of local citizens to raise awareness about biodiversity, threats to it and to build a grassroots movement to build a regenerative future in the region of the Sierra Gorda in Querétaro. In 1997 GESG achieved the naming of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, as a Natural Protected Area. The only example of civil society generating such a change. Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda is a model of entrepreneurship and social participation in the Sierra Gorda, Mexico, where we correlate economic development with biodiversity conservation.



### National Youth Congress on Right to Food was held by DYDF (UNCCD accredited CSO in Bangladesh)

[Dhrobotara Youth Development Foundation](#) (DYDF) one of the UNCCD accredited CSOs from Asia, with support of Food Security Network, KHANI-Bangladesh, organized the [National Youth Congress on Right to Food](#) on October 2020. This event aimed to involve the whole nation with the leadership of youth, to motivate them in agriculture, nutrition and rights to food activities and tackling the challenge of food security.

This event brought together 100 young female and male participants and raised their concerns to amend the Right to Food Act. It was emphasized that there is no effective platform to advocate the right of farmers and youth, and governments need to use their innovations, insight and idea to cope with their relevant challenges. Recognition of people's access to food, enact the Right to Food Act in accordance with the UN Food and FAO Voluntary Guidelines, provision of necessary goods to the people highly affected by COVID-19, and recognition of the land ownership of the women farmers was amongst the final recommendations of the event. The main messages of the event were included within a youth declaration that was declared and sent to the related authority.



## Workshop on Capacities and Challenges on the Implementation of the UNCCD in Iran, September 2020

To strengthen and activate the implementation process of the United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification and strengthen the National Working Group on Combating Desertification, a workshop on ‘Introduction of Capacities and Challenges on the Implementation of the UNCCD, Towards Preservation, Rehabilitation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources’ was held by the National Focal Point Institution in Iran. During the workshop, presentations on the Convention, challenges and cooperation capacities at various levels were made by the Office of

Desert Affairs, Education and Extension of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Supreme Forest Council and [CENESTA](#) (the CSO Panel of the UNCCD-Asia). The participants of this workshop stressed the importance of synergistic among environmental conventions, knowledge sharing on preventing LDN, capacity building, increasing inter-sectoral cooperation and the use of the high potential of the CSOs, particularly indigenous nomadic pastoralists and local communities. One of the most important achievements of the workshop was re-establishing the ‘National Working Group on Combating Desertification’ by the National Focal Point of the Convention with participation of key stakeholder representatives: <https://b2n.ir/665354>



**Regional Certified Webinar entitled African Youth and Civil Society Green Growth Hub: Form Pandemic to 2030 Agenda** was held on 28 September 2020, organized by African Network of Young Leaders for Peace and Sustainable Development ([ANYL4PSD](#)) in partnership with Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF).

The online regional workshop is part of a series of certified webinars organised within the [New Deal for Nature and People](#). The objective was to build the capacity/knowledge of African youth leaders so as to play an active role in the achievement of the decade of accelerated action, transformation pathways and in the implementation for sustainable development through increased engagement and mobilization. Link to report: <https://bit.ly/2SZKQNe>



**Good Food**  
for a  
**Better Normal**

## Dr Mariam Akhtar-Shuster shares her insights on the Drynet Podcast Series: Good Food for a Better Normal

Drynet has recently published the sixth and final episode of the 2020 Drynet Podcast Series: Good Food for a Better Normal. This episode explores the relevance of the Rio Conventions in addressing current crises with Dr Mariam Akhtar-Shuster of the Project Management Agency of the German Aerospace Centre. For many people the Rio Conventions are abstract and distant from our realities and daily lives. Drawing on her many years of experience working with communities in the global drylands, Dr Akhtar-Shuster provides insights into how the Rio Conventions can support appropriate local actions that can enhance the well-being of vulnerable farming communities.

Mariam Akhtar-Shuster is a former co-chair of the UNCCD Science Policy Interface, and she brings a depth of insight into the contributions of science in advancing sound policies and decision making, and explores how we can all use the platforms created by the Rio Conventions to advance planetary sustainability, retain healthy ecosystems and support the livelihoods of the people of the drylands.



*The Drynet Podcast Series: Good Food for a Better Normal explores the complex systems that sustain life on the planet and put food on our tables, challenges some of our preconceptions and shares insights about how we can do better to leave a positive legacy to future generations. The podcast series is produced by [Drynet](#), a network of civil society organisations engaged with local dryland communities to support their endeavours to use land-based resources in the most sustainable way possible. The network and its members promote the concerns of land-based communities in the context of the UNCCD and the other Rio Conventions. If you would like to download and listen to the podcasts, please download them at <https://dry-net.org/the-drynet-podcast-series-good-food-for-a-better-normal/> or wherever you get your podcasts.*

## Call for Case Studies for the New Edition of GLO

[The Global Land Outlook](#) 2nd edition (GLO2) is now under preparation and will be launched at UNCCD COP15. It aims to support the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration by offering a positive narrative and future scenarios that stress the potential and opportunities afforded by a continuum of restoration activities that improve environmental conditions by avoiding, reducing, and reversing land degradation while at the same time deliver multiple benefits (i.e., ecosystem goods and services) that underwrite the current and future sustainability of our societies, economies, and the planet.

GLO2 print and digital products will focus **on promoting and learning from case studies and good practice examples from around the world**. Consideration will be given to the presentation of case studies in a range of formats (e.g., comprehensive, full page, box, pull outs) for GLO2 report and the digital platform. A strategic communications campaign will enhance the dissemination of case studies by linking social and other media to the GLO2 knowledge base created.

Case studies will also increment analytic papers and recommendations on the following subjects (to be confirmed):

- Youth engagement
- Gender equity and responsiveness
- Tenure security
- Urban-rural linkages
- Resilient food systems
- Perverse incentives and repurposing subsidies
- COVID-19 response and recovery



GLO Regional Reports (2019)

**Your organizations' experiences and field practices are valuable and need to be valorized through this coming GLO.** You can contribute by submitting case studies at the regional, national, or sub-national scale that illustrate conservation, sustainable land management and restoration activities that have a positive impact on communities and nations. Please provide as much information, references, and links as possible using the form attached.

Submissions will be collected until 31 December 2020. Please share them through: [csopanel@unccd.int](mailto:csopanel@unccd.int)



THANKS EVERYONE FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS!