



## United States Department of State

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Thematic Discussion: Desertification  
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Check Against Delivery

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Good afternoon. In this morning's interventions, we discussed the role of drought forecasting both within the United States and through our foreign assistance programs. At this time, our Delegation would like to highlight some of the successes of on-the-ground, community based solutions in combating desertification.

During the 1930's the United States experienced a severe drought and resulting desertification known as the "dust bowl." The causes of the dust bowl were a classic combination of the misuse and overuse of land. The work of the Civilian Conservation Corps on reversing soil erosion and other bottom-up solutions empowered through local and national government legislations restored the viability of the land. Today, the Natural Resources Conservation Service works with farmers and soil conservation districts to improve the management of agricultural and natural habitats.

Drawing on experience gained during the dust bowl era, and then during the great Sahel droughts of the 1970's, our foreign assistance programs focused on community-based natural resource management (NRM) to improve land productivity and provide economic opportunities for communities facing recurring drought and desertification. Over the last twenty years, African farmers have transformed large areas of the Sahel by investing in an array of NRM practices, including on-farm and community forestry, soil and water conservation, and more intensive management of natural products. While farmers invested to pull themselves out of poverty and up the economic ladder, their efforts created landscapes with greater ground cover and greater diversity. USAID and its development partners focused on this sustainable land transformation by (a) bringing about policy and institutional reforms that transferred resource rights and management authorities from the government to rural communities, (b) offering organizational and enterprise management training that helped communities manage resources according to democratic and business principles, and (c) supporting action research that pioneered natural forest regeneration and soil and water conservation. USAID-supported initiatives led the way in breaking the command-and-control paradigm and in demonstrating the transformational potential of a rural population empowered by greater rights.

In many areas of the world, dryland agriculture is not the most profitable or the most appropriate use of land. Over the past 20+ years, a great number of programs have used the

Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) model with wildlife conservation as the primary income resource. Similar to community based programs these focus on (a) developing policy and institutional reforms that transferred resource rights and management authorities from the government to rural communities and (b) organizational and enterprise management training that assists communities to manage resources according to democratic and business principles.

Let me describe some examples. Since 2007, USG and northern Kenyan development partners have put 400,000 hectares of land under improved management and expanded ecological connectivity with four protected areas. Support was centered on 12 community conservancies selected for their diversity of habitats, range of wildlife species, tourism potential and community commitment to rangeland conservation and livestock development options. In Namibia through support of USAID and partners, communities are registering as conservancies that serve as localized NRM institutions. The establishment of conservancies has increased local responsibility and ownership over wildlife and other natural resources with one in nine Namibians involved in a conservancy. In 2007, these conservancies received over US\$ 3.7 million in generated income, and the result has been that wildlife populations continue to increase. In Malawi, community capacity building activities emphasize increased participatory community involvement in natural resources management and empowerment of people and communities in order to place stewardship for better management and protection of natural resources in the hands of the people.

Ultimately, combating desertification requires local action supported by policy, legislation and technical resources.

Thank you.