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## **UN meeting on desertification discusses effective approach to land management**



From right: Drylands Ambassadors Dennis Garrity and Deborah Fraser, UNCCD Executive Secretary Luc Gnacadja and COP10 President Don Koo Lee

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Experts attending a United Nations conference in the Republic of Korea on reversing desertification today focused their attention on the “landcare approach” to sustainable land management, a community-based way designed to improve people’s livelihoods while protecting natural resources.

“Landcare provides a sound, knowledge-based approach from the bottom up,” said Luc Gnacadja, the Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), whose Parties are attending its 10th session in Changwon, Republic of Korea.

“We must take action in order to fight desertification, land degradation and drought with a bottom up approach, otherwise we miss meeting important international targets such as the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)),” he said.

Dennis Garrity, Landcare International Chair and recently designated UNCCD Drylands Ambassador, told the gathering that “what people are doing on the ground is what it’s all about.”

“Landcare is all about grassroots support for land restoration and land regeneration, and that’s what makes it so valuable for the UNCCD, because we’ve learned over the years that bottom-up approaches of communities taking charge of their environment, grappling with their problems, and drawing in support from outside is the key to land regeneration throughout the world.”

Experts from Australia, Iceland, South Africa and the United States discussed the challenges and successes they have witnessed in the landcare approach.

Terry Hubbard and Horrie Poussard of the Australian Landcare International described a project to restore the King Parrot Creek area of Victoria that had seen an increase in soil erosion and loss of native plants and wildlife. Local landowners and others collectively began restorative efforts by volunteering their time and knowledge and saw significant improvements over several years.

For every one Australian dollar invested in landcare, there was a seven-fold benefit, said Michelle Lauder of Australia’s Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The figure was based on calculations of volunteer efforts compared to the cost of paying workers and buying equipment.

Hafdís Hanna Aegistóttir, the Director of the Iceland-based UN University Land Restoration Training Programme, described efforts in that country to restore degraded land and noted that landcare may help Iceland to become a carbon-neutral country.

Describing the burgeoning landcare movement in the United States, Jeff Herrick of the US Department of Agriculture reiterated the importance volunteerism to conservation.

Richard Selemela, the Director of Natural Resource Management in South Africa, spoke of the significance of building landcare programmes to help meet the MDGs, the internationally agreed targets to eradicate extreme poverty and boost development in poorer countries by 2015.

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