



## 2019 Land for Life Award

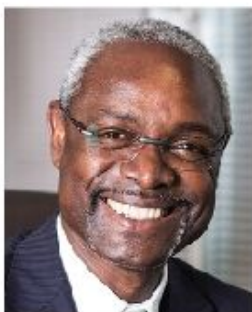
Decades of Impact





## 2019 LAND FOR LIFE AWARD

### DECADES OF IMPACT



The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary.

It's time to look back at the progress made in land restoration and sustainable land management, to draw inspiration for the upcoming decades, to improve practices and multiply the benefits.

The 2019 edition of the Land for Life Award puts the spotlight on individuals and organizations that made outstanding contributions to achieve land degradation neutrality on a large scale, with long-term changes and dedicated actions for 25 years or longer. Those remarkable projects involve local people, communities and the society, raising the level of their ambition.

Meanwhile, recent assessments remind us that two billion hectares of land are now degraded worldwide. This represents an area larger than the territory of the Russian Federation, the biggest country in the world.

The Land for Life Programme aims to promote awareness and share relevant facts on sustainable land management by showcasing initiatives that have been implemented by dedicated individuals and groups, who have been mobilizing action to reverse the negative trends.

**The challenge is huge, but there are solutions.**

May those success stories galvanize people worldwide to act and scale up effective initiatives in their own countries, regions and communities.

Let me extend my sincere congratulations to the winners and warm appreciation to all the finalists for their tireless work.

Ibrahim Thiaw  
Executive Secretary  
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

### 2019 LAND FOR LIFE WINNERS

- ◊ MERET Project of Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopia
- ◊ Mathieu Ouédraogo, Burkina Faso

### 2019 LAND FOR LIFE FINALISTS

- ◊ AIDER, Peru
- ◊ Judy Butterfield & Allan Savory, USA/Zimbabwe
- ◊ Konya Sugar Industry and Trade Corporation, Turkey
- ◊ Paola Agostini, Italy/USA
- ◊ Society of African Missions, Ireland/Africa
- ◊ Simon Maddrell, United Kingdom/Kenya



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## WINNER OF 2019 LAND FOR LIFE AWARD - FIRST PLACE

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### MERET PROJECT OF THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, ETHIOPIA

First created as a response to food crises of the 1970s, MERET Project is supported by local government, World Food Programme (WFP) and many other partners and donors. Its interventions **changed 2.5 million hectares of degraded watersheds**, which were barren and devoid of vegetation cover, water yields and soil moisture in more than 72 woredas (districts) in the regions of Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, SNNPR, Somali and Direedwa.

Operations consisted of a diverse mix of water harvesting and soil conservation, reforestation and re-vegetation measures.

Dried springs have been restored, discharge rates of rivers and springs substantially increased. The availability of water increased the opportunity of small-scale irrigation and the promotion of high value crops that raised the income of resource-poor farmers.

The creation of abundant vegetation cover in the catchments changed the arid conditions into cooler and moist environment with favorable outcomes for humans, domestic and wild animals.

The results clearly demonstrate the possibility of reversing and preventing the adverse effects of climate change, the process of desertification and vulnerability to droughts through proper land rehabilitation and sustainable management of the natural resources.



Rehabilitated farm lands with improved crop production

#### NUMBERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES ...

- ◇ **50% reduction of food shortages** in rehabilitated watersheds
- ◇ **66%** of MERET beneficiary farmers **escaped poverty**
- ◇ Over **2.5 million ha** restored
- ◇ Over **6.5 million people** positively impacted

#### Looking ahead to 2030

##### In well-rehabilitated areas

Utilizing available opportunities for intensification of production and diversification of livelihoods to achieve food security and alleviate poverty.

##### In degraded areas

Rehabilitating degraded lands and restoring productivity, biomass and biodiversity, hydrological balance and boosting water yields in the catchments by integrating proven technologies and promoting good land stewardship.

***MERET is almost a miracle.***  
*Seeing once degraded land  
where people are now  
making a living is impressive.*

*- Mr. Sylvain Bayalama,  
Ambassador of the Republic of Congo*



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## WINNER OF 2019 LAND FOR LIFE AWARD - SECOND PLACE

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### MATHIEU OUÉDRAOGO, PRESIDENT OF RÉSEAU MARP, BURKINA FASO



Contour stone bunds technique

Mathieu Ouédraogo is a passionate and dedicated man who works hand in hand with innovative farmers in Burkina Faso since his career began in the mid-1970s. He developed and promoted the contour stone bunds technique, a simple water harvesting method, which has spread across the Northern part of Burkina's Central Plateau. Combined with the improved planting pits (zai) for which Yacouba Sawadogo received a Right Livelihoods Award in 2018, the contour stone bunds produce a significant improvement in crop yields, food security, tree growth and groundwater recharge. Mr. Ouédraogo systematically and successfully advocated for the use of both techniques.

In 1992, Mr. Ouédraogo created the Réseau MARP (in English: Participatory Rural Appraisal) – the first organization in Burkina Faso promoting participatory research techniques, while being on the frontline of restoring degraded land to productivity. In 2009, it became the first organization in Burkina Faso to experiment in micro dosing (using small quantities of mineral fertilizers) at farm level in six provinces.

Mr. Ouédraogo has developed numerous programmes, planned and coordinated several impact studies on behalf of universities and various organizations, such as Africare and the World Bank. Certain that education is essential to ensure the continuity and permanence of a vision, he gave

#### NUMBERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES ...

- ◇ Since 1980, **tens of thousands of farmers** adopted the combined technique and improved their livelihoods
- ◇ **300 000 ha** of land have been restored
- ◇ **50–60% increase** in **soil fertility** and **cereal yields** achieved
- ◇ **50 % reduction** of **rural poverty** achieved

more than a hundred training sessions on water and soil conservation, and defense and restoration of soil in many African countries.

Tireless in pursuing his vocation, **he has a specific goal in mind for the next decade**: *“We are aiming for the **Fin de la faim** (End of Hunger) by greening Burkina Faso by 2030. Our ambition is that the dryland ecosystems of sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Sahel, are regenerated and that rural communities are socially and ecologically resilient, supported by inclusive governance and undertaking a large-scale land restoration. Our goal is that communities, governments, NGOs and the private sector adopt and replicate the assisted natural regeneration approach as a viable method to restore much of the degraded lands and build resilience and food security for the community members.”*



On the right, Aly Ouédraogo, innovative farmer, exchanging experiences and tricks with visitors. (Mathieu Ouédraogo in the middle wearing a hat)

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## WINNER OF 2019 LAND FOR LIFE CHINA AWARD

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### YUN DAN

#### INCUMBENT HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE OF TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION

*"To protect the ecosystem of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is to contribute my part to the sustainable development of China. Achieving economic growth at a price of damaging eco-environment would lose its significance."*

- Yun Dan

As the former leader of the Tibet Forestry Administration, he has played an active role in overcoming technological challenges to plant trees in the high-altitude Nagqu area of Tibet. Thanks to his efforts and guidance, over thirty tree breeding bases has been set up across Tibet, significantly improving the self-sufficiency ratio of saplings from 30 per cent to 80 per cent and **afforesting an area of 3,725 km<sup>2</sup>**.

Believing that a well-preserved, sustainable environment of Tibet would offer a reinforced shield for China's ecological security and help Tibetan people to live a better life, Mr. Yun put forward a new approach to Tibetan forestry modernization during his tenure as the leader of the Tibet Forestry Administration. He is one of the first local officials in China that acknowledged the role of ecological compensation in poverty alleviation.



Mr. Yun introducing the tree breeding base at Qushui County, Lhasa to Wu Yingjie, Secretary of the CPC Tibetan Committee during his investigation into the forestry development and progress of ecological migration in high altitude areas on 8 October 2018



#### The approach highlights the need to:

- ◇ Carry out major projects to protect and restore key ecosystems;
- ◇ Set up diversified market-based mechanisms for ecological compensation;
- ◇ Develop new modes of investment and financing for forestry advancement;
- ◇ Deepen forestry reforms in Tibet to advance targeted poverty alleviation and move the region toward a more prosperous and inclusive future.

Mr. Yun also proposed a new afforestation strategy that promoted large-scale afforestation projects, prioritized the creation of mixed forests and encouraged the use of elite native tree species. Following his strategic initiative, CNY 1.58 billion (approximately USD 230 million) were invested and **276,900 forestation-related jobs created**.



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### WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE INTERNATIONAL JURY WHO KINDLY REVIEWED THE APPLICATIONS AND SELECTED THE WINNERS OF THE 2019 LAND FOR LIFE AWARD

Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of UNCCD

Ms. Mariam Akhtar-Schuster, SPI member, senior scientific advisor at the Project Management Agency in the German Aerospace Center

Ms. Marcella D'Souza, Trustee & Director of WOTR in India (Watershed Organization Trust), former 2017 Land for Life Award winner

Ms. Konstanze Abouleish, Board member of SEKEM in Egypt, former 2015 Land for Life Award winner

Mr. Gustavo Fonseca, Director of Programs at the GEF

Mr. Jian Liu, Director of the Science division, UNEP

*"We are impressed by the remarkable work that MERET Project has accomplished over more than three decades, involving and empowering local communities throughout Ethiopia. This project has a great potential for continuous impact in Africa in the following years and – even more importantly – for replication and enhancement of the positive effects on a global scale."*

*"Mathieu Ouedraogo is involving even the poorest farmers, who can adopt the accessible and affordable technique he has developed. They are now able to work with tailored measurements tools to register the output of their activities. We are recognizing here a lifelong commitment to restore not only the landscape but the lives of people in the Sahel."*

### THE 2019 LAND FOR LIFE CHINA AWARD WINNER WAS SELECTED BY THE KUBUQI INTERNATIONAL DESERT FORUM STEERING COMMITTEE

Elion Foundation

National Forestry and Grassland Administration

Ministry of Science and Technology

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Provincial Governmental of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region

*"Yun Dan has made a great contribution to the protection and improvement of the ecological environment and to promoting the forestry reform in Tibet. Thanks to Yun Dan's efforts, a number of tree-breeding bases were set up and operated by the newly incorporated Tibet Land Afforestation Group Co., Ltd., thus removing a long-standing barrier to rapid expansion of afforestation in Tibet."*

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We acknowledge the valuable support  
of our dedicated partners



United Nations  
Convention to Combat  
Desertification

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