

For Immediate Release

To: All Media

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Attention: News Editors / Agricultural Writers

HOW DOES DESERTIFICATION OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES CONTRIBUTE TO THE FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGE INCREASED BY COVID-19?

The ARC celebrates the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought 2020.

Pretoria: The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) was commissioned by the Department of Environmental Affairs to undertake a research study themed “Trends of Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought, Indicators of the UNCCD for South Africa”, as part of its obligation to report on the status of land degradation and drought in South Africa as a signatory to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

The research covered trends of land productivity using the following indicators: drought occurrences, salinization, biomass production, soil carbon stocks, bush encroachment, causes of changing land cover and soil erosion.

Desertification is experienced mainly in arid and semi-arid areas of South Africa. It can lead to a persistent decline or loss of ecosystem services essential to sustaining life, thus affecting food security and the natural resource base.

The challenge of ensuring food security for all has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. All factors that have an impact on food security must be attended to by decision makers and other role players. One such factor is desertification.

The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought is observed annually on 17 June. Its purpose is to raise awareness of the presence of desertification and drought, highlighting methods of prevention and recovery. The focus in 2020 is on changing public attitudes to the leading drivers of desertification and land degradation. In celebration, the ARC-Soil, Climate and Water has scheduled a webinar on Wednesday 24 June, with speakers including Dr Mohamed Abd Elbasit (topic: “Soil erosion potential mapping of South Africa”) and Dr Johan Malherbe (topic: “Drought occurrence and its impact”).

Dr Mphekgo Maila, head of the ARC-Soil, Climate and Water research campus, commented: “The success in efforts to control and reverse land degradation rests not only upon knowledge of its status, causes or impacts, but also on adopting systematic and integrated approaches that address the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of the processes of desertification, land degradation and drought.”

Invitations to the webinar will follow.

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Notes to the Editors

About the Agricultural Research Council

The Agricultural Research Council is a premier science institution that conducts research with partners, develops human capital and fosters innovation in support of the agricultural sector. The ARC provides diagnostic, laboratory, analytical, agricultural engineering services, post-harvest technology development, agrochemical evaluation, consultation and advisory services, food processing technology services as well as various surveys and training interventions. For more information visit the ARC website at: www.arc.agric.za