

Statement by Elizabeth Maruma Mrema
Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity
on the occasion of
World Soil Day
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“Halt soil salination, boost soil productivity”

Above-ground biodiversity relies on below-ground biodiversity – the biodiversity we cannot see that works beneath our feet.

Soil biodiversity underpins the functioning of ecosystems that provide essential functions and services to sustain food and water security and deliver multiple benefits to virtually all facets of sustainable development.

Soil biota plays an important role in maintaining healthy soils through a wide range of ways, through nutrient cycling, carbon storage, improving water retention and reducing the risk of soil erosion. Certain soil biota can also help resist pests, pathogens and diseases, and increase plant tolerance to drought, toxicity and salination.

While salt in soils occurs naturally, many soils around the world are suffering from salination due to several factors. Unsustainable agricultural practices such as improper irrigation and fertilizer use, deforestation, and overuse of groundwater can cause large amounts of salt to accumulate within agroecosystems, degrading the landscape and making them less productive. These factors are often exacerbated when coupled with the impacts of climate change and land degradation.

A threat to soil health is a threat to food security.

If we are to feed the world’s growing population, we must boost productivity as part of a sustainable pathway. Halting soil salination, improving soil health and reversing soil biodiversity loss are essential to sustain food production and manage the impacts of our food systems.

More sustainable management of soil resources through the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of soil biodiversity can play an important role in transforming our food systems to better reflect the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity.

This year, as the world negotiates a post-2020 global biodiversity framework, we have a unique opportunity to highlight the important role of soil biodiversity in supporting food security. When

understanding our food systems, we must recognize and listen to those who work with soil and who are custodians of soil biodiversity.

We have only just begun to learn about the microscopic world of soil biodiversity. On today's World Soil Day, I encourage everyone to reflect on your knowledge of soil biodiversity and the importance that healthy soils have on our diets and on our lives.