

Rising sea-levels in the spotlight during environment month

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2014 as the International Year of Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) to give recognition to these destinations and to also create awareness with regards to their challenges and successes.



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The focus this year is to create a greater understanding of the importance of SIDS and the urgency to help protect the islands in the face of growing risks and vulnerability to natural and environmental disasters, particularly to climate change on the sector.

Islands are faced with problems such as climate change, waste management, unsustainable consumption, degradation of natural resources and extreme natural disasters. As global temperatures rise, there has also been an increase in sea-level which can cause flooding, coastal erosion, loss of land and infrastructure along coastlines of low lying islands.

In South Africa, a significant proportion of the metropolitan areas, including numerous towns and smaller settlements, are situated along the coastline and are increasingly becoming vulnerable to storm surges, coastal erosion, sea level rise and extreme weather events. The 3,650km coastline is generally exposed to moderate to strong wave action and provides little shelter to storms from the sea.

Other key events that are celebrated during this month include World Environment Day on 5 June, World Oceans Day on 8 June, and World Day to Combat Desertification on 17 June.

Agents of change

World Environment Day is celebrated annually around the globe. It was established in 1972 by the United Nations General Assembly at the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment to present an opportunity for everyone to realize their responsibility to become agents of change. The day is celebrated to create, educate and raise awareness on environmental conservation.

World Oceans Day will be celebrated on 8 June and the theme for this year is 'Together we have the power to protect our ocean for a better economy'. The theme addresses the deterioration of health and productivity due to poor management of the ocean. World Oceans Day is aimed at honouring ecosystem services provided by the ocean while improving the conservation of marine species as well as for educating the public on protecting the ocean.

World Day to Combat Desertification is celebrated annually on the 17 June. It has been observed since 1994 to promote public awareness relating to international cooperation to combat desertification and the effects of drought, and the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

World Day to Combat Desertification will highlight the benefits of main-streaming sustainable land management policies and practices into our collective response to climate change. The theme for this year is 'Ecosystem-based adaptation' and the slogan is 'Land belongs to the future - lets climate proof it'. It aims to promote community and ecosystem resilience while improving the human condition particularly in dry lands.

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