Sustainable Land Management

One out of every three people on earth is in some way affected by land degradation. Latest estimates indicate that nearly 2 billion ha of land worldwide – an area twice the size of China – are already seriously degraded, some irreversibly. This includes large areas of cropland, grassland, woodland and forest areas whose degradation reduces productivity, disrupts vital ecosystem functions, negatively affects biodiversity and water resources, and increases vulnerability to climate change.

Sustainable land management (SLM) is crucial to minimizing land degradation, rehabilitating degraded areas and ensuring the optimal use of land resources for the benefit of present and future generations. SLM is based on four common principles:

- land-user-driven and participatory approaches;
- integrated use of natural resources at ecosystem and farming systems levels;
- multilevel and multistakeholder involvement; and
- targeted policy and institutional support, including development of incentive mechanisms for SLM adoption and income generation at the local level.

Its application requires collaboration and partnership at all levels – land users, technical experts and policy-makers – to ensure that the causes of the degradation and corrective measures are properly identified, and that the policy and regulatory environment enables the adoption of the most appropriate management measures.

FAO LINKS HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

In identifying "conservation, improvement and sustainable use of natural resources for food and agriculture" as one of the five pillars of its Strategic Framework for 2000-2015, FAO reconfirmed its mandate to help countries and regions develop coherent policies and actions that contribute to efficient and socially desirable management of land resources while enhancing the positive and mitigating the negative effects of agriculture on the environment. This reflects the challenge of striking an appropriate balance between conservation and sustainable use of resources. FAO has established an Interdepartmental Working Group on Desertification to ensure that the wealth of FAO's expertise and experience on land degradation and SLM issues is harnessed for the benefit of FAO's member countries, contributing to improved food security and poverty alleviation.

FAO IN ACTION – COMBATING LAND DEGRADATION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE, PARTNERSHIPS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Information gathered from hundreds of projects and programmes implemented by FAO and its partners over the past decade now provide a rich base of best practices and lessons learned from a diversity of ecosystems and contexts.

Capacity building

FAO supports member countries on a wide range of complementary SLM technologies and approaches, through training, information, communications, tools and equipment, advisory services for institutional strengthening, policy reforms and national programming. FAO has introduced and promotes a range of SLM programmes and approaches, such as farmer field schools,

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conservation agriculture, catchment and farming systems approaches to integrated land and water management and better land husbandry, *gestion des terroirs* and local land planning, integrated plant and pest management (IPPM) and sustainable forest management. FAO is also executing a number of projects, funded by GEF, that address transboundary land degradation issues, including: Integrated Management of the Fouta Djallon Highlands, Transboundary Agro-ecosystem Management Programme

for the Kagera Basin, and Using Farmer Field School Approaches to Overcome Land Degradation in Agro-pastoral Areas of Eastern Kenya.

International forum

FAO provides a neutral forum and organizes international assemblies that allow governments and interested organizations to come together to address their concerns about pressures that lead to degradation, and build consensus on the optimal ways to use and manage their land, water and biological resources.

Knowledge management and dissemination of best practices

FAO remains in the forefront of gathering and disseminating data and information on agriculture, land, water, fisheries and forestry resources through its member countries and field projects. Its information systems and databases related to land degradation and SLM are built upon scientific knowledge, local experience and farmer innovation.

Numerous databases and scientific reference materials related to SLM are available through FAO's Web site, such as: FAOSTAT, TERRASTAT, AQUASTAT and FORIS that contain data on agriculture, land, water and forests. These information systems include, *inter alia*, the Land Resource Information and Decision Support System (LRIS), the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS), the FAO/UNESCO Digital Soil Map of the World and Derived Soil Properties (DSMW), the FAO/IIASA Global Agro-ecological Zones Study (GAEZ) and the Forest Resources Assessment (FRA). Information is also available on standards and regulatory norms in relation to water administration (FAOLEX) and livestock management (LEAD), as well as through programmes, such as Africover and its expansion under the Global Land Cover Network (GLCN), and the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA). In addition, FAO is a leading partner in several international initiatives, such as the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT), Asia-Pacific Agroforestry Network (APAN), the Participatory Watershed Management in Asia Network (WATMANET) and the Network for the Integrated Management of Salt-Affected Soils (SPUSH).

PARTNERING IN SLM

Land degradation is a widespread and growing problem that can only be tackled through coordinated and collaborative approaches and targeted programmes and action. Thus, at the international policy level and in project implementation at national and local levels, FAO collaborates with many intergovernmental, regional, national, non-governmental and scientific institutions and multilateral and bilateral development partners. FAO also collaborates closely with the UNCCD Secretariat, the GEF Secretariat and implementing and executing agencies at the project, policy and strategic levels.

TERRAFRICA PARTNERSHIP FOR SLM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Agricultural production in sub-Saharan Africa is falling by three percent a year as a result of land degradation. To stop, prevent and reverse further degradation, TerrAfrica, a multi-partner initiative led by the World Bank and NEPAD, aims to increase the scale, efficiency and effectiveness of investments towards sustainable land management (SLM) in sub-Saharan Africa. TerrAfrica and its related Strategic Investment Programme (SIP) partnership is based on the pillars of coalition building, knowledge management and investments. Terrafrica/SIP provides a collective vehicle for addressing bottlenecks, resulting in unlocking and increasing efficiency of financial and non-financial resources and, in turn, mainstreaming and financing effective nationally driven SLM strategies. FAO plays a key role in the technical preparation of the programme, including the development of the vision paper, technical guidelines and knowledge management.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Land Water Division

Environment, Climate Change and Bioenergy Division

www.terrafricaknowledgebase.org

http://www.fao.org/desertification