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A REPORT ON THE
Proceedings

National Seminar
‘Drylands Rehabilitation – Poverty Alleviation’

Mon 05th June 2006, Karachi-Pakistan

Preface

Drylands encompass the arid, semiarid and the dry sub-humid zones, occupying 41% of the earth's land area and inhabiting nearly 2 billion people – one third of the world's population. Desertification is the degradation of the drylands and 70% of the world's drylands, or some 3600 million hectares are degraded. The contributing factors are mainly climatic variations and human activities resulting in destruction of topsoil, followed by loss of the land's ability to sustain crops, livestock or human activity and it is an adverse environmental process.

Deserts all over the world are known to be increasing at the expense of agricultural land; this is most severe in arid and semi-arid regions. This has hampered agriculture growth which is a necessary condition for rural, non-farm growth and rural development in general. Broad based rural growth is in turn necessary for poverty reduction, because the majority of the world's poor rely on agriculture land for their income and food.

In 21st century, the most important human concern will probably be wise use and conservation of water resources – water resource management. Water is necessary for the growth of vegetation, while water stress causes loss of vegetation with accompanying of sand creeping, enhancing the desertification process.

World population is expected to exceed 8.0 billion by 2025. On an average, 73 million people will be added annually, and 97% of the projected growth will take place in the developing countries. Nearly 1.2 billion people live in a state of absolute poverty. About 800 million people being food insecure and 160 million pre-school children suffer from malnutrition.

Combating desertification, as outlined in 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and as per the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, greening of the drylands and providing adequate fresh water resources has a major impact on poverty alleviation and in the provision of a better quality of life to more than one third of the world's poor people inhabiting these areas, mostly in developing countries. Desertification and drought have been estimated to account for annual loss of US\$ 42 billion in terms of food productivity worldwide.

The total area of Pakistan is 179.6 million hectares, 90 percent of which is dry and about 70 million hectares of which are considered to be arid and semi arid. Approximately 11 million hectares of these lands are desert. The total irrigated area of the country is about 16 million hectares. The majority of the population derives its livelihood from these regions, and with continual population growth, these areas are now becoming depleted because of over-exploitation of soils, plants and water resources.

Pakistan's major environmental concerns are land degradation due to urbanization, droughts, floods, salinity, seawater intrusion as well as deforestation, biodiversity loss, mono-cropping, groundwater depletion. The environmental impact on human health is on the rise due to exposure to contaminated water, overuse of pesticides, over dependence on fossil fuel, and toxic waste from industries, hospitals and households. Poor people are particularly vulnerable to the hazardous impacts of environmental degradation.

Poverty alleviation is the most important sector on Pakistan's development agenda and increasingly efforts are focused on reducing the level of poverty and improving the quality of life of the poor and the marginalized people. In addition to a multi-sectoral approach to combat poverty, major emphasis is directed towards the development and growth of agriculture sector, the largest single component of the nation's GNP. Noticeable progress has been achieved over the past few years, however poverty reduction and environmental degradation are still a major challenge.

With this background and the current drylands scenario at national and global levels, Foundation for 'Progress' in collaboration with the Department of Environment & Alternate Energy, Government of Sindh and with the cooperation of UNEP, convened and organized a one-day national seminar on 'Drylands Rehabilitation – Poverty Alleviation', in conjunction with the World Environment Day commemorations 05th June 2006.

The objectives of the seminar were both to highlight the importance of desertification and the poverty reduction potentials of the drylands, while supporting the Government of Pakistan and UNEP's concerted efforts in meeting the paramount global challenge of poverty alleviation, which is also among the top priority on the international agenda for the 21st Century as set out in the United Nations eight Millennium Development Goals.

The Specific Objectives of the Seminar were: To review the current drylands state-of-knowledge and to provide scientific advice and promote technical practices and technology and to assist in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); To raise national awareness, disseminate information, educate communities, foster cooperation between the stakeholders for addressing Pakistan's drylands concerns.

The seminar was participated by about 200 delegates and dryland scientists, representing 80 organizations/institutions, reflected the diverse range of interest in the drylands debate. The seminar acted as a sounding board for the policy and the decision makers and shall make way for dialogue and further communication between the various stakeholders.

We believe that paying attention to the drylands and recognizing their potential for sustainable development will pay great dividends, most notably in the improved livelihoods of the poor people inhabiting these regions.

Dr. M.A Wajid

*Convener of the Seminar
Chairman & President
Foundation for 'Progress'*

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***National Seminar
'Drylands Rehabilitation - Poverty Alleviation'***

"If a man owns the land, the land owns him"

Drylands occupying 41% of the earth's land and inhabiting nearly 2 billion people – one third of world population as a consequence of poverty, unsustainable land management and climate change are turning into deserts and desertification in turn is exacerbating and leading to social, economic and political tensions creating conflicts, causing more impoverishment and further increasing land degradation. Growing desertification worldwide threatens to increase by millions the number of poor forced to seek new homes and livelihoods.

Continual population growth, over exploitation of soils, plants and limited water resources are stressing Pakistan's already limited agriculture producing land and are accelerating at an alarming pace the process of drylands desertification.

The nexus between environmental degradation and poverty is now well established, each reinforcing the other: the poor are both agents and victims of environmental destruction. Poverty alleviation is the most important sector on Pakistan's development agenda and a multi-sectoral approach to combat poverty, with major emphasis directed towards the development and growth of agriculture sector, the largest single component of nation's GNP, is the government's major policy directive and action program.

The report of the National Seminar on, 'Drylands Rehabilitation - Poverty Alleviation', highlights the aetiology, management, rehabilitation and conservation of the drylands and presents an overview on Pakistan's drylands scenario and their poverty alleviating potentials. It further identifies that different climatic and geographical regions demand a number of separate water and land conservation techniques, the final choice of which must respond to the criteria of technical, socio-economic, political, institutional and environmental sustainability.

It recommends that reducing population pressures, better water and land management practices, sustainable crop management, more careful irrigation, provision of non-farming jobs, utilizing and respecting endogenous community knowledge, encouraging local ownership, strengthening local and national capacities to implement poverty eradication interventions, full participation of minorities, particularly women and indigenous groups and implementation of pro-poor, pro-environment policies can help to address the drylands rehabilitation issues. Fighting poverty in drylands requires that all these problems are addressed simultaneously.

Pakistan more than ever before is determined to tackle its serious environmental problems, particularly land degradation for achieving the country's dream of a healthy environment for sustainable development.

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