

The Soil Conservation Training Programme

The first settlers who came to Iceland more than 1100 years ago came to a fertile land. At the time of their arrival it is estimated that 60% of the country was covered with vegetation.

After the settlement, rapid population growth led to intensive use of fragile ecosystems. This led to accelerated erosion magnified by volcanic activity and harsh climate conditions.

To halt the destructive forces in Iceland, a unique legislation was passed in 1907, and the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, one of the first institutions of its kind in the world, was established. Since then the combat against soil erosion and land degradation has been an ongoing struggle.

And still - after 100 years - poor land condition and continued soil erosion are considered to be the most severe environmental problem in Iceland.

But there are also numerous success stories about how eroded and desertified land in Iceland has been stabilized and made productive.

Although we are far from having solved all problems of soil erosion and land degradation, wide ranging experience and knowledge has been gained. The Icelandic Government is highly committed to continue the struggle against soil erosion and land degradation.

In our view the knowledge and experience gained in Iceland can be of much relevance to a number of countries in all parts of the world. To share this knowledge the Government of Iceland has initiated The Soil Conservation Training Programme.

The main objective of the programme is to assist developing countries to build their own capacities to mitigate land degradation and combat desertification. Aware of the important role women play in agriculture and land care, gender aspects are an integrated part of the programme.

Recent international activities in Iceland include the Global Forum on Soils, Society and Global Change focusing on the synergistic roles of soil conservation and vegetation restoration in meeting local, regional and global environmental and social challenges.

The Forum gathered over 130 scientists from all over the world. In the conclusions from the Forum the scientists suggested that UN CCD should be developed further to cover all soil protection, as severe land degradation occurs in many areas outside the so called CCD areas. Furthermore they recommended the establishment of independent panel of experts for the UN CCD.

Fertile land is the foundation for water and food security. It is estimated that food production in the world has to be doubled within the next 50 years.

But landcare is a not only a challenge for food security it has clear links to climate, biodiversity, poverty reduction and peace.

Therefore it is of utmost importance to unite efforts and to strengthen the links between international conventions on environmental issues. Iceland stresses especially the link between the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and food security. But it is also important to send a clear message to all the Rio Conventions, urging them to work even more closely together.