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Land degradation has different meanings to different people. It implies reduction in the resource potentials in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. Land degradation results mainly from human impact on fragile ecosystems. The Sahelian zone of Africa is the most affected.

The relationship between people and their natural support systems (forests, grassland, croplands and waters) in drylands has been broken down as a result of sustained overuse. Natural resource systems, sustainably maintained as a result of adaptive nature of pastoralists and traditional farmers management practices, were disturbed. Nomadic systems, shifting cultivation and other forms of integrated farming systems are examples. Important trees of dryland areas, valued by local communities for their wide range of uses and purposes, are lost as a result of exploitation and mismanagement. They are replaced by exotic species that make the drylands situation in dilemma. Local communities are losing land and tree tenure and no longer have access to natural resources as they were practicing under customary laws. As a result they are gradually losing their traditional resource-based income generating systems. Non-wood forest products trade is expanding but the resources are declining.

Most analysis, concerned with declining trends of the natural resources, focused on drought, disorder of national economy and conflicting policies. However the problem may be more associated with management approaches and strategies. Drylands are experiencing steady decline in per capita grain production and income but an increase in population. These aspects are stressing the natural support systems. Traditionally managed sustainable yield of forests and grasslands, as integrated with agriculture, is being breached.

Progressive ecological degradation, climate changes and economic decline have serious negative impacts on the communities of the drylands areas specially farmers, pastoralists and the rural poor.

Over 70% of forests and woodlands clearing in drylands is for agriculture and fuelwood. Horizontal expansion, rather than vertical development, is the main approach for increasing crop production to meet increasing food demand, income generation and export policy requirement. The result is wood removal exceeding sustainable yield by 2 - 10 times, leading to vast areas of bare lands under fragile environmental conditions. The remaining forest stock is progressively declining in area, densities and composition. Grasslands are not exempted as livestock number is expanding, as fast as human population, exceeding the carrying capacity. Soil deterioration and erosion accelerate degradation and lowers productivity.

Since late sixties, much of drylands is continuously suffering from decline in rainfall. Drought is becoming more frequent. Some assume that increasing drought frequencies is due to natural fluctuations resulting from oscillations of the atmospheric circulation while another school hypothesizes that drought increase is due to land use changes over extensive areas. The later, resulting

from forests clearance, is believed to disturb the balance between rainfall run-off and evapo-transpiration resulting in reduction of rainfall.

Efforts to arrest the process of land degradation (conferences, research, pilot projects etc.) have resulted in limited achievements but in much knowledge and experience that can help in clearly defining the problem and designing suitable approaches to development. What approach? "may be resource-based" to restore forests, woodlands and trees outside forests and to enhance soil conservation and integrated agriculture. What are the reasons that degradation processes are continuously going on while little is achieved in solving the problem? Is it because governments are not enthusiastic to implement policies? Is the indigenous knowledge ignored? Is international assistance not giving enough support? Are local experts and scientists participation limited? Let us try to explore new approaches for the management of the resources.