

The idea of Sustainable Development, and what it means for achieving zero net-growth in degradation

Between 1980 and 2005 about 10-20% of the drylands were either degraded or in the process of being degraded, and despite advances in scientific research the situation has not changed significantly. And unfortunately, when degradation gets a hold there is a danger that it will spiral into further deterioration or decline of both the soil and the livelihoods of land users. **Therefore the first challenge for us today is to identify and assess the opportunities to prevent desertification worsening, or even happening at all. Secondly, restoring degraded land will help compensate for permanently lost soil.** After that we will be able to go on to use the sustainable land management technologies we are currently developing to adapt to constraints such as the pressures of economics, current institutional legislation, or changing climatic trends. In addition, embracing principles for reducing commodity use, or articulating a zero economic growth concept for sustainable development may be crucial for saving the planet from further degradation.



Zero Growth is an ethic that has been put forward to reinforce sustainable development. The goal is an equilibrium state where any advances are at least balanced by retreats. Zero growth is considered to be most effective if it is on a global scale, emphasising cooperation rather than competition.



Reducing desertification to Zero Growth, - the approach

The **EU-funded DESIRE Project** addresses the need for rapid introduction of more sustainable land management technologies, and recognises that these can help to achieve a **Zero Growth** strategy. DESIRE researchers have worked with stakeholders at local scales in 17 countries, to choose technologies to improve their long term chance of conserving their environment and achieving a good standard of living from the land. The success of the chosen technologies has been evaluated in terms of physical, economic, institutional, social and cultural factors. This process (the WOCAT methodology) has identified constraints, such as land tenure and legislation enforcement problems, that often need to be addressed at national level to have the required mitigation impact. The methodology developed by the DESIRE Project also identifies opportunities to adapt to changing conditions, whether they be determined by the natural environment, as in the case of changing climate, or be the result of human interventions.

The **DESIRE Project** therefore calls on national **Focal Points** to take responsibility for ensuring that the importance of these issues is recognised in their countries. Without decisive action to support measures to combat desertification at national level the recommendations of scientists cannot be implemented. Reducing the incidence of land degradation to **Zero Growth** is in the hands of politicians, especially those who make decisions on policy, legislation, and how environmental budgets will be spent.

“The public needs to know and understand that achieving a global target of zero-net growth in land degradation and desertification is essential for our own survival in the 21st Century.”
(Luc Gnacadja, 2010)

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Further Reading:

The Ethic of Zero Growth, Ken Meyercord, 2001. <http://www.zerogrowth.org/ZeroGrowth.htm>

Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, 2010

http://www.unccd.int/publicinfo/pressrel/showpressrel.php?pr=press12_01_10

The DESIRE project (2007-2012) is funded by the European Commission, VI Framework Program, ‘Global Change and Ecosystems’ and brings together the expertise of 26 international research institutes and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

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