

CONCLUSIONS

The 5th International Conference on Land Degradation (5th ICLD) was successfully held at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (MAI-B), Italy in 18-22 September 2008. About 100 participants from 37 countries from around the world attended. Dr. Cosimo Lacirignola, director of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari and President of the Fiera del Levante welcomed all the participants during the opening ceremony. He paid particular attention to the important role of the decision makers especially in the implementation of scientific results.



A total of 43 oral and 50 poster presentations were made covering all continents. Keynote papers were provided by Dr. Luca Montanarella (EC-JRC Ispra, Italy), Prof. Raoul Ponce-Hernandez (Trent University, Canada), Prof. Ahmet Mermut (University of Saskatchewan Canada/ Harran University, Sanlurfa Turkey), Christy van Beek (ALTERRA, The Netherlands), Gerd Dercon (IAEA Vienna, Austria), Sally Bunning (FAO, LADA, Rome, Italy), Dr. Ben Sonneveld (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands), and Prof. Selim Kapur (University of Çukurova, Adana, Turkey).

The theme of the conference: “*Moving ahead from assessments to actions: Could we win the struggle land degradation?*” was thoroughly discussed and debated. The main outcome is that such fight could be won if the right policy instruments are put in place and most importantly when local people are both authors and actors of the development process. Only in this way it is possible to make a change and to reverse the trend of land degradation, as despite the “troubling” data and pessimistic scenarios there are as well many success stories in the sustainable management of natural resources.



Participants of the 5th ICLD during the Opening Ceremony held at Fiera del Levante in Bari

Conference participants agreed that environmental measures, which include interventions in the range of agricultural, forest, land, water and livestock sectors, should be assessed on both productivity and ecological functions and on the effects they have on ecosystem stability. Soil conservation and restoration should be one

component of an integrated ecosystem management strategy that should include also water, biodiversity, livelihoods and human impacts on ecosystems.

A major outcome of the conference was that research findings and their use in scenario development for guiding policy should be validated by long term monitoring systems and addressing land degradation requires consideration of both biophysical and socio-economic aspects since there is evidence that often the latter are determinant, especially in determining land use options. Recent positive trends in reducing soil erosion or improving fertility (notably in the EU countries and the Americas) through protective soil cover, restoring soil organic matter and reducing compaction, provide good examples to be followed in other regions and for addressing other land degradation processes such as chemical degradation for instance. The positive results should be used to further emphasise the urgent needs for further actions worldwide to accelerate and scale up progress and not the opposite to induce complacency.

The Conference draw special attention to the fact that not all soil and water conservation measures work well, as there are plenty of examples of failures due to being ill-adapted in terms of limited impact. Improved land resources management measures should build on scientific evidence, local innovation and knowledge and be locally tested and validated before being applied at larger scale. Natural resource base should continue be a priority for national Governments and international organisations. Africa requires particular attention due to limited resources and research capacities, and evidence of little progress over recent decades to stimulate agricultural and economic growth and to address the cumulative pressures of expanding populations, food insecurity and political instability.

Conference participants decided to propose the reactivation of the **Working Group on Land Degradation (WG-LD)**, established under the **International Union of Soil Science**. All participants being present signed a document and none of them opposed such proposal. The conference unanimously elected the following people to lead the WG-LD:



From the left: Prof. Selim Kapur (Secretary, Turkey), Dr. Pandi Zdruli (Deputy Secretary, Italy), Dr. Marcello Pagliai (Chair, Italy) and Prof. Angel Faz Cano (Vice Chair, Spain)

An internationally known publisher will publish a special issue of about 30-50 Selected Papers of the 5thICLD. Finally, great appreciation was expressed for the excellent organisation and warm hospitality shown by the MAI-B. The 6th International Conference on Land Degradation will be held in Egypt in autumn 2111.