



Round Table Conference

22nd November 2007
Ahmedabad

A Follow-up of:

Regional Conference on Natural Resource Conservation, Use and Sustainability in Drylands
(Held between December 18 - 20, 2006)

Background

Drylands with high economic value and productive potential include arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid region with desert fringes. India has about three-fourth of land area classified as drylands. From decadal to century scale these land use systems, arid and semi-arid dryland ecosystems, have supported farming, pastoral and artisan communities for meeting their livelihood options. The cultural adaptive mechanism of the stakeholder community for fragile and variable eco-systems is now endangered by industrialization and economic development which disturbs ecosystem balance irreversibly with adverse consequences. This calls for prudent approach to sustainably interact, utilize and manage the natural resources and ecological functions for sustainable economic growth at the regional scale. Projection suggests that the second phase of agriculture growth and economic sustenance will come from the drylands.

Drylands and fringes of deserts in the Kachchh region are endowed with unique biodiversity and natural resources of economic value. There appears to be faster degradation, indiscriminate and unsustainable practices leading to loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services at various scales. It has been cause for concern in the recent past due to fast disappearance of the biodiversity calling for urgent mitigation option to arrest further degradation leading to desertification. Thus, a consorted approach to analyze the natural resources conservational needs and management issues through a proactive interaction between the researchers, environmental conservationists, policy planners and stakeholder community was the main goal of the regional conference conducted on 18-20th December 2006 at Bhuj. The conference was organized to address the main themes as below:

Conference Themes

- Desertification, Problems and Solutions – An overview
- Natural Resources and Sustainability/Biodiversity Conservation
 - Natural Resources and Sustainability
 - Dryland Biodiversity and its Conservation
- Indigenous Knowledge on Dryland Natural Resource Management
- Action Priorities and Way Forward

Organizers

The conference was organized by the Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE) and the Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan, Bhuj, Kachchh. The conference received support from various national and international agencies as part of the **International Year of Deserts and Desertification** declared by the United Nations.

Participants

A broad spectrum of participants including 123 national and international dryland experts were chosen to represent the drylands across the world, who can share their rich experience on various facets of the dryland research and sustainable developmental approaches. Various participant stakeholders included state agencies, NGOs, farmer groups, business community and scientists. These participants for 3 days brain stormed on challenges of desertification, dryland biodiversity, natural resources and its dependent communities.

The Outcome and Identified Priority Developmental Needs:

The consensus outcome of the conference placed priority concerns to step-up research on the dryland ecosystems, improve livelihood options and arrest the processes of desertification in the Kachchh/Gujarat region. There was common critical comment on the impact of impending global climate change on these ecosystems. The research community also agreed on need based research and development considering the interlinked and interactive system where stakeholder communities, livestock populations as well as diverse biodiversity co-exist with changing livelihood options, which has direct relevance for conservational and developmental research in the region. At the end of 3 day deliberations, the future course of action was prioritized. Finally, the conference came out with Bhuj declaration, a baseline policy advocacy document on dryland ecosystem, people's livelihood and desertification.

Follow-up:

The Bhuj declaration incorporated salient features of dryland policy issues which is a blueprint for future course of action. In order to stress the importance and the need to follow up the recommendations of 'Bhuj Declaration' this round table conference is planned. This follow up conference mainly intend to take the outcome of the conference and the salient points of Bhuj Declaration to policy makers at government level, in order to stress the conference of dryland issues of the region.
