

Commission on Land Degradation and Desertification – COMLAND

General Report 2000-2004

Background and Aims

- To promote and coordinate interdisciplinary research on land degradation and desertification in our changing global environment.
- To study the effects of environmental change, both natural and human induced, and their implications in land degradation and desertification.

Our challenges are to develop new tools for monitoring changes and to understand what makes human attitudes to a more ecological world, and how is the land degradation problem perceived by local populations.

The focus of attention will be the vulnerability of ecosystems and concerned societies, in order to communicate and alert authorities about the adequate surveillance of land degradation processes. Our biggest challenge is to involve the coming generations in our research and scientific task. Half of the Commission members are young and promising scientists.

Land degradation and desertification are not positive fields of science. Rivers, glaciers and other nice geographical features are no doubt exciting, but like medical doctors, we have chosen earth diseases as our field of investigation, and therefore we can define our task as a commission of GEODISEASES. And the aim should be not only to describe and define the degradation problems and to study their extent, but also to analyze the causes and try to find solutions.

Membership

The steering committee members of COMLAND to August 2004 come from the following countries:

- Israel (Prof. Moshe Inbar, COMLAND Chair)
- Australia (Assoc. Prof. Arthur Conacher, Secretary)
- Canada (Dr. Stefannie Scott)
- Iceland (Assoc. Prof. Guðrún Gísladóttir)
- India (Prof. V.C. Jha)
- Argentina (Prof. Julio Costello)
- Spain (Prof. Maria Sala)
- England (Prof. Michael Stocking)
- South Africa (Prof. Mike Meadows)
- Germany (Prof. Otmar Seuffert)
- USA (Dr. Paul Hudson)

In addition there are 266 corresponding members from all continents. The number increased by 54 members since last report.

Cooperation

Several scientific meetings were organized in cooperation with following organizations:

- International Association of Geomorphologists (IAG): Sediment Budget session in the IGU Congress in Seoul, 2000; Session at the IAG Congress in Tokyo, 2001; Joint session with IGCP in Uppington, South Africa, 2001.
- Association of American Geographers: Session at AAG Pittsburgh Conference, 2000; Association of Indian Geomorphologists - XXII Conference in Santiniketan, 2001; Sociedad Mexicana de Geomorfología - COMLAND Symposium 2001.

Several commission members are active and cooperate with following international organizations:

- UNESCO (collaboration by Maria Sala in the Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems)
- IGBP – International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme - Participation in the Menemen-Turkey (2000) International Conference: The Future of the Mediterranean Rural Environment.
- ESSC – European Society for Soil Conservation
- LUCC – Land Use and Land Cover Change
- Soil Conservation Service - Iceland
- CIAT – International Centre for Tropical Agriculture, Colombia

Activities

Research

1. Task force for land degradation in cold climates and winter conditions. Current members: Gregor Ollesch, Germany (coordinator); Linnel Edwards, Canada; Guðrún Gísladóttir, Iceland; Yuri Soukhanovski, Russia.
2. Task force on wind erosion. Convenor: Greg Okin, USA.
3. Task force on erosion around the Mediterranean Basin. Maria Sala agreed to Prof. Buttimer's request to establish a task force concerned with land degradation around the Mediterranean Sea.
4. Task force on land degradation in tropical areas. An initiative by S.C. Rodrigues (Brazil) was accepted by COMLAND in the Tokyo meeting.
5. EC Project IC18CT970147 in the field of scientific and technological cooperation with developing countries: Effects of land use and land management practices changes on land degradation under forest and grazing ecosystems, MEDCHANGE. Maria Sala (Spain), Celeste Coelho (Portugal) (Coordinator) and other commission members from Spain, Morocco and Tunis.

Meetings in 2000

Pittsburg, USA – April 4-10

Field trip and COMLAND session in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers. Organizer: Anthony Orme.

Seoul, Korea – August 16

TO3-s1 session of the IGC Korea Congress. Organized by COMLAND. Local organizer: Jong-Wook Kim. 9 papers were delivered on general and regional cases, and on socio-economic impacts of land degradation. Most of the studies focus on social and economic factors.

Seoul, Korea – August 16

Special Session I: Sediment Budgets in Geomorphic Systems. Organized by the International Ass. of Geomorphologists (IAG) and COMLAND. Sediment budgets and their implication for land management was the main topic of the 6 papers session.

Meetings in 2001

Santiniketan, India – January 9-11

XXII Conference of the Institute of Indian Geographers and COMLAND. Organized by Professor V.C. Jha, full member of COMLAND and attended by 225 participants. The emphasis was on the geographical interactions with regard to the fact that millions of hectares are affected by land degradation, reducing their potential capacity to provide goods and services to the community.

Mexico – May 7-14

Organized in an excellent way by Dr. Jose Luis Palacio and collaborators, the COMLAND Mexico meeting was an unqualified success, with more than 60 participants from distant parts of the world, from Finland to Argentina. Forty one papers were submitted in oral or poster presentations, and it included a five days excursion from Mexico City to the Paricutin volcano in the state of Michoacan.

Land degradation as a result of land use changes, is a major problem in the urbanized areas of the large City of Mexico, as well as in the deforested mountains and hills. The message was that change is occurring at a pace which demands immediate actions from local and government authorities, but taken measures are not always led by research and scientific approaches.

For many of the participants it was their first encounter with Mexico, its spectacular volcanic landforms and the warm and kindly human environment.

Tokyo – August 23-28

Fifth International Conference on Geomorphology. COMLAND session S28: The role of Geomorphology Combating Land Degradation. Conveners: A.J. Conacher and Y. Ono. Nine papers were presented, covering many world areas with land degradation and desertification problems: China, Japan, Australia, Brazil, Spain, USA, India, Israel and Turkey.

Upington, South Africa – August 31-September 2

Dryland Change 2001, Understanding Future Drylands from Past Dynamics, convened by COMLAND and IGCP-413. Organizers: Mike Meadows and Dave Thomas. The meeting was a fruitful mix of scientists from both the IGCP and COMLAND communities, and the talks ranged from land management of floral displays in Namaqualand to Aeolian dust sources in Central Asia to the environmental history of the Australian desert. Two field trips were organized in conjunction with the conference.

Meetings in 2002

Grahamstown and Durban, South Africa – July 29-August 8

IGU Regional Congress COMLAND paper session. Land Degradation in the Eastern Cape Frontier Region. Convenors: Kate Rowntree and Roddy Fox.

Meetings in 2003

Catamarca, Argentina – May 5-10

COMLAND meeting and field trip. Land Degradation and Management in the Andean Semiarid region. Organizer: Julio A. Costello. 85 participants. Twenty from Latin American countries, USA, Spain, Australia, Israel. First meeting of IGU Commission in Argentina.

Reykjavik, Iceland – August 16-23

COMLAND meeting and field trip. Organizer: Guðrún Gísladóttir. Around 50 participants, including 30 locals. Unique experience for all participants.

Mexico City – October 27-November 2

IAG Regional Conference. COMLAND special session. 32 papers in Section S.4: Soil Erosion and Geomorphic Features of Land Degradation. Organiser: Paul Hudson.

Meetings in 2004

Solsona, Catalonia, Spain – May 15-20

COMLAND meeting and field trip in occasion of the retirement of Prof. Maria Sala. Organisers: Ramon Batalla and Celso Garcia. Around 100 participants, from 16 different countries and leading scientists in the environmental and geomorphological fields. An excellent conference and field trips.

Glasgow, Scotland – August 15-20

Main IGU Congress. Field trip and session papers. Organisers: Donald Davidson and Arthur Conacher. 9 Sessions with about 40 papers.

Future Meetings in 2005:

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam – April 18-29

Land Degradation and Poverty. Organizer: Dr. Steffanie Scott, E-mail: sdscott@fes.uwaterloo.ca

Uberlândia, Brazil – May 16-22

International Symposium on Land Degradation and Desertification. Organizer: Dr. Silvio Rodrigues, E-mail: silgel@ufu.br

Future Meeting in 2006:

IGU Regional Conference, Brisbane, Australia.

COMLAND Website – <http://www.comland-commission.com>

Gregor Ollesch, Germany, established the website. Currently it is being run by Carsten Kremb, Germany. It contains the aims and structure of COMLAND and planned activities.

There is a long list of tens of recent papers published in different journals by Commission members. A Bibliography on Land Degradation and Desertification issues is under preparation by Otmar Seuffert, Germany.

PUBLICATIONS – 2000-2004

COMLAND Newsletter No. 4 (2001)

CONACHER, A.J. (ed.) (2002): Australian Geographical Studies, 40(2), Special Theme on COMLAND Symposium on The Role of Geomorphology in Combatting Land Degradation as part of the International Association of Geomorphologists Congress in Tokyo, August 2001.

CONACHER, A.J. (ed.) (2001): Land Degradation, Papers selected from contributions to the sixth meeting of the International Geographical Union's Commission on Land Degradation and Desertification, Perth, Western Australia, 20-28 September 1999, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht.

JHA, V.C. (2001): XXIIInd Conference of Institute of Indian Geographers (IIG) and IGU Commission Meeting on Land Degradation and Desertification, Abstracts of Papers, Department of Geography, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, India.

PALACIO, J.L. et al. (2001): Proceedings and Fieldtrip Guides, International Symposium on Land Degradation and Desertification, May 7-14, 2001, Mexico City, Patzcuaro, Michoacan, Mexico IGU Commission on Land Degradation and Desertification and Institute of Geography-Institute of Ecology, Institute of Anthropology, Nacional Autonomous University of Mexico.

LEGORRETA PAULIN, G. (2001): Field Trip Guide: Paricutin Volcano and surroundings, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.

SIEV, C. et al. (2001): Popocatepetl volcano field trip guide: International symposium on land degradation and desertification, Mexico City, May 7-14, 2001, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Mexico.

VAZQUES, L.S. et al. (2001): Field Trip Guides: International Symposium on Land Degradation and Desertification, Mexico City and Patzcuaro, Michoacan, May 7-14, 2001, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Mexico.

DE TAPIA, E.M. (2001): Teotihuacan: urbanization and human impact on the prehispanic landscape in the northern basin of Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, COMLAND conference, May 7-14, 2001, Mexico.

COSTELLO, J. (2003): Simposio Internacional de Degradacion y Desertificacion, Proceedings, Catamarca, Argentina, May 5-10, 2003.

INBAR, M. and COSTELLO, J. (2003): Field Excursion Guide, Catamarca, NW Argentina, May 7-10 2003.

GISLADOTTIR, G. (2003): Land Degradation and Mitigation, Problems, Conflicts Solutions, COMLAND Reykjavik Conference, August 16-23, 2003.

GISLADOTTIR, G. (2003): South Iceland- Post Conference Field Trip, COMLAND Conference, 2003.

INBAR, M. (Guest Ed.) (2003): Geografiska Annaler, 85A Special issue on the Mexico 2001 Symposium.

MEADOWS, M. (Guest Ed.) (2004): Land Degradation and Development, 15B, Special issue on 2002 Durban Meeting.

BATALLA, R.J. (Ed.) (2004): Conference Program and Abstracts, International Conference On River/Catchments Dynamics, Natural Processes and Human Impacts, Solsona (Spain).

BATALLA, R.J. and SALA, M. (Eds.) (2004): Field trip, The Tordera River basin.

BATALLA, R.J., VERICAT, D. and BALASCH, J.C. (2004): The Ribera Salada basin.

BATALLA, R.J., VERICAT, D. and BALASCH, J.C. (2004): The Lower Ebro River.

Planned Publications:

Land Degradation and Mitigation, Special issue on 2003 Iceland meeting; Guest Eds. G. Gisladottir and M. Stocking.

Degradacion y Desertificacion, Special volume on the Catamarca 2003 meeting (Spanish).

Soil Erosion and Geomorphic Features of Land Degradation, Special issue on the 2003 IAG Mexico meeting; Guest Ed. P. Hudson.

IASH Sp. Pub., Selected papers from the Solsona Meeting (due 2005).

Elsevier Book presented to Prof. Maria Sala (due 2005).

Moshe Inbar, Haifa, Israel
(August 2004)