

International Symposium on Drylands Ecology and Human Security (ISDEHS)



*Perspectives, Policy Responses and Sustainable Development
in the Arab Region - Challenges and Opportunities*

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اطلب من العلوم علماً ينفك الأذى والعيب ثم يرفعك

*"Ask for the knowledge that would be useful to you ,
would keep you from harm and shame, than elevate you"*

Thematic Session:

Assessing the Security Implications of Desertification - Recognizing and Coping with Increasing Regional Tensions and Social Instability in Relation to Progressive Resource Scarcity

Session Convenor(s)

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The aim of this session is to outline the overall challenge of the desertification debate within the context of vulnerability and human security in drylands.

A considerable amount of empirical work on the relationship between environmental degradation and likely violent conflicts indicates that countries affected by drought and desertification seem to be more vulnerable.

In particular major parts of Sub-Saharan Africa are seriously threatened by progressive desertification and in addition continue to face some of the world's greatest development challenges. More than 200 million people are undernourished, thousands of displaced persons are housed in refugee camps and the quality of essential resources such as water, grazing- and arable land are seriously under threat. While income in these regions relies mainly on natural resources, desertification, caused by anthropogenic activities and enhanced by climatic changes, has massive and very negative social, environmental and economic impacts. Once productive drylands are degraded, livelihoods are no longer secure, resources become overexploited, social tension increases, traditional cultural systems collapse and armed conflicts are increasingly driven by resource availability. In the next decades, population growth, rising average resource demand, and persistent inequalities in resource access ensure that scarcities will affect many environmentally sensitive regions with a severity, speed, and scale unprecedented in history.

Nevertheless, this does not imply a global causal relationship where resource scarcity will inevitably end up in violence. This session will argue instead, that we cannot exclude conflicts, if scarce goods are distributed unequally within or between societies and if policies to redress such trends will remain absent in the future. Consequently, we assume that the political and socio-economic framework conditions are the major determinants when it comes to resource distribution and environmental degradation.

Induced by population pressure, many countries have been experiencing continuous land degradation characterized by extensive desertification. Irresponsible and inappropriate government policies undermine human security by reducing access to, and the quality of, the already scarce natural resources that are important to sustain people's livelihoods. As a result progressive land degradation has in many cases led to severe poverty, followed by communal clashes (often misinterpreted as ethnic and/or religious clashes) and human displacement. Comprehensive and preventive policy approaches and societal mechanisms will be urgently required to reverse these negative social consequences.

From a conceptual perspective, the environment should be an integrated element of security policy, if the survival of individual states, regions or of the international system at large, is threatened by resource scarcity and environmental destruction. Therefore future research in this area should be placed in the larger context of global economics, as well as international law and policies.

Please note that the deadline for submitting your abstract is October 15, 2006.