

**COMISIÓN ASESORA SOBRE DEGRADACIÓN DE TIERRAS  
(CADETI)**

**RESUMEN EJECUTIVO**

**INFORME DE COSTA RICA  
PARA LA IMPLEMENTACION DE LA CONVENCION DE LAS  
NACIONES UNIDAS PARA COMBATIR LA DESERTIFICACION  
(UNCCD)**

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## Abstract

Costa Rica has one of the highest densities of biodiversity on Earth. Around 24% of its territory is in protected areas (public or privately owned). Nevertheless, the country presently undergoes serious soil degradation problems.

The process of soil degradation in Costa Rica should be regarded integrally. Geographical, climatic, social, and cultural factors must be taken into account, as well as the impact of current agricultural development schemes and the international globalization process, which determines international exchange policies and the country's consumption patterns.

This first national report on the status of soil degradation has identified the following leading factors of degradation in Costa Rica:

- ❖ Increasing cultivation of marginal soils.
- ❖ Spontaneous appearance of small settlements in mountainous areas.
- ❖ National land ownership patterns leading to use of fragile areas.
- ❖ Badly planned, designed and operated irrigation systems.
- ❖ Insufficient enforcement of laws promoting soil and forest conservation.
- ❖ Deforestation and poor management of forest resources.
- ❖ Poor management of natural resources in watersheds.
- ❖ Extreme natural events.
- ❖ Economical policies leading to unsustainable management of natural resources.

In 1989, 20 per cent of the national territory was estimated to be severely eroded. Since then, the most critical areas have been identified. According to official accounts, 47 per cent of the soils nationwide are highly prone to degradation, only 28.2 per cent are subject to appropriate use, 45.2 per cent are underused and 26.6 per cent are overused.

Some aspects of existing forest policies represent a significant effort to minimize the increased rates of degraded land surface and to promote recovery of degraded areas.

Furthermore, the Law for Soil Use, Management and Conservation was enacted in 1998. This law is intended to help protect, preserve and improve soils by means of their integrated and sustainable management along with that of other natural resources; this is to be achieved through integrated environmental promotion and planning.

The law provides the country with the regulatory and institutional framework for the design and implementation of nation-wide actions to avert soil degradation, including institutional organizations and data gathering for land use planning.

Efforts in the legal field have been followed by numerous other public actions: the identification of the most strongly affected areas, specific projects involving integrated

management of some important watersheds in the country, soil studies, conservationist agriculture projects, and the prevention of emergency risk situations.

Regulations involving forest use and conservation have been accompanied by concrete actions tending to prevent and/or revert degradation processes, such as the payment for environmental services rendered by forested and reforested areas. This payment is an incentive given in exchange for the direct influence that forests and forest plantations have on protection and improvement of the local environment.

In addition, academic sectors have contributed with research and knowledge in areas such as soil and forest restoration, wetland conservation, demographic growth and unplanned urbanization. Furthermore, certain non-governmental organizations play an active role in environmental education and in analyzing existing legislation.

However, only a few of these activities have been designed with an integrated view of the soil degradation problem. Most have been carried out in an uncoordinated manner and without long term planning.

Current plans have a diminished functionality due to the lack of a nationwide coordinating agency and of a national action program against soil degradation, as well as a financial strategy.

Another limitation is the absence of environmental education actions oriented to prevention. In addition, gender contents are usually not considered in the existing soil degradation prevention plans.

Even though participation of local communities has been important in the execution of environmental protection actions, they have been excluded from the decision making process. Communication and awareness-raising strategies regarding this specific subject are lacking. The work of the NGOs has also been fragmentary and lacking of a global perspective.

After this first exploration of the subject, the Advisory Commission on Soil Degradation (Comisión Asesora sobre Degradación de Tierras, CADETI) shall commit itself to the development of a National Action Program to combat soil degradation. It is expected that the necessary financial support will be provided for a wide consultation with representatives from all social groups, as well as from relevant public and private institutions. This discussion shall include the results of the First National gathering for Awareness – raising on Soil Degradation and Desertification (Primera Jornada Nacional de Sensibilización sobre Degradación y Desertificación de Tierras), carried out in January 1999, as well as the results of the workshop organized to analyze this first national report (May, 2000).