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The international community has long recognized that Desertification is an important economic, social and environmental constraint for development in drylands. Despite long-term efforts, land degradation and desertification are progressing in many drylands. With regard to the scientific components of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the main priority theme of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), as recommended at the CST sessions in the COP8 in Madrid / Spain (3.-14. September 2007), will be bio-physical and socio-economic monitoring and assessment of desertification and land degradation, to support decision-making in land and water management.

Towards a Dryland Observation System

The working group “Dryland Observation System” of the European DesertNet organised a workshop on the 6th and 7th September 2007 at Hamburg, Germany, to develop a joint vision and roadmap for dryland observation. The group included specialists from relevant disciplines, e.g. meteorology, geography, remote sensing, GIS, hydrology, biodiversity, ecology, land use science, political science and other social sciences.

The group decided to focus on a small number of priority areas. These include:

- **To assess, monitor and improve our understanding of the present state of, and trends in, dryland ecosystems and their services as a tool for supporting actions leading to sustainable use and mitigating desertification.**
- **To identify a suitable and focused set of harmonized variables and protocols for use in remote sensing and ground observations.**
- **To support the goals of the UN Conventions on Desertification, Biological Diversity and Climate Change and promote synergies between them.**

To realize these three goals the group decided to carry out the following specific actions:

1. Outline the **mission** of the group for broader communication, identifying gaps and the steps needed to fill these, and addressing some issues of global concern such as food security, carbon sequestration and biofuels.
2. **Develop a network** of partners (international, national, institutions, and individual researchers), who already actively observe ecosystems in the drylands (e.g. CEOS, GTOS, GEOSS, GMES, ILTER, OSS, BIOTA, ROSELT, ELTOSA, ...).
3. Prepare and organise **workshops on** ground observations, field studies, remote sensing and modelling to recommend a minimum set of variables and methods for assessment and monitoring, and communicate these to ongoing global observation initiatives.
4. **Review existing** observation activities and data in order to identify gaps in their thematic focus and spatial distribution of ground observation sites, with the goal of supplementing these through new activities by the Dryland Observation System.
5. Stimulate and support **research project proposals** promoting the above goals.

(7th September 2007 Hamburg, Germany)