



## **LEDDRA, FIRST PLENARY MEETING**

### **Yichang, China, April 27-30, 2011**

#### **PRESS RELEASE**

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In these times, recurrent environmental and socio-economic crises attract public attention because they are interdependent and they have serious consequences, especially for the deprived segments of society in resource-poor and vulnerable regions. Food, water and energy security all depend on availability of natural resources but also on markets, finances, management systems, property regimes, life style and many other factors. Limited and scarce natural resources – soil, water, biodiversity – make even harder the difficult dilemmas that face decision makers; how to use the land to satisfactorily meet as many human needs as possible. The prevention of land degradation and desertification and the conservation of resources are, thus, essential priorities in the perspective of securing the survival and well-being of humankind now and in the future, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions. Moreover, it is urgent to devise solutions that are not only scientifically sound but also economically viable, socially acceptable and adapted to the particular characteristics of the affected regions where they are implemented.

The University of the Aegean is coordinating an EU-funded international research project, LEDDRA, or *Land and Ecosystem Degradation and Desertification: Assessing the Fit of Responses*, for the period 2010-2014. LEDDRA aspires to add new and refine existing scientific and policy-relevant knowledge to address such issues.

LEDDRA builds on more than 20 years of EU-funded and time-long international research that has assessed the extent and determinants of land degradation and desertification and has explored various strategies and land management systems to support the sustainable development of affected regions. The LEDDRA consortium comprises 9 partners from universities and research organizations across Europe, the Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II (Morocco) and the Department of Soil and Water Conservation, Changjiang River Scientific Research Institute (China). The consortium combines their varied, multidisciplinary expertise to comprehensively and systematically study the responses to land degradation and desertification in cropland, grazing land and forests/shrubland regions. Professor Helen Briassoulis, the coordinator of LEDDRA, explains “this is a fundamental prerequisite for rational, responsive and effective sustainable land management and land use planning and sensible policy making at all levels”.

Adopting the ecosystem approach, LEDDRA explores the environmental, socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors that influence how people choose to manage land and resource degradation and develops novel integrated approaches to assess the costs and benefits of these choices. A wide range of stakeholders, from local land users, to policy makers, to the *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought*, will be consulted. Applications in European and non-European study sites are conducted. LEDDRA examines various policies that contribute to or detract from land degradation in order to offer policy advice for diverse stakeholders at the international, EU and national levels to support the implementation of solutions that promote environmental and social welfare.

The Project website <http://leddra.aegean.gr/> incorporates LEDDRIS (<http://www2.aegean.gr/leddris/>), an Information System that will include posters, video-clips, downloadable documents, photo-albums and other media to attract the interest of a wide-ranging audience and to disseminate the project findings in ways that suit the diverse interests and needs of different types of stakeholders.

The Soil and Water Conservation Bureau of the Changjiang Water Resources Commission hosts the first LEDDRA plenary meeting at Yichang, China between April 27 and 30, 2011.

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