Land degradation

WHAT IS LAND DEGRADATION?

Land degradation is a broad term that can be applied differently across a wide range of scenarios. It is a process in which the value of the biophysical environment is affected by a combination of human-induced processes acting upon the land. It is the reduction in the capacity of the land to provide ecosystem goods and services and assure its functions over a period of time for the beneficiaries of this. Increased population pressures and excessive human expansion into drylands during long wet periods leave an increasing number of people stranded there during dry periods.

CAUSES OF LAND DEGRADATION:

Land degradation is a global problem, largely related to agricultural use. The major causes include: Land clearance, such as clearcutting and deforestation; Agricultural depletion of soil nutrients through poor farming practices; Livestock farming that includes overgrazing and overdrafting; Inappropriate irrigation and overdrafting; Monoculture that destabilises the local ecosystem; and Urban sprawl and commercial development.

IMPACT:

There are four main ways of looking at land degradation and its impact on the environment around it: A temporary or permanent decline in the productive capacity of the land: This can be seen through a loss of biomass, a loss of actual or potential productivity, or a loss or change in vegetative cover and soil nutrients; Action in the land's capacity to provide resources for human livelihoods: This can be measured from a baseline of previous land use; Loss of biodiversity: A loss of range of species or ecosystem complexity as a decline in the environmental quality; and Shifting ecological risk: Increased vulnerability of the environment or people to destruction or crisis. This is measured through a baseline in the form of pre-existing risk of crisis or destruction.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION:

Over the year, the South African government has spent millions of rands on land rehabilitation projects, mostly funded through the LandCare conditional grant.

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