

## LEDDRA PRESS RELEASE

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In these times, recurrent environmental and socio-economic crises often 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 a new EU-funded four-year international research project, LEDDRA, or Land and Ecosystem Degradation and Desertification: Assessing the Fit of Responses, that 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, that comprises 11 partners from universities and research organizations across Europe, Morocco and China, will combine their varied, multidisciplinary expertise to comprehensively and systematically study the responses to land degradation 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 will explore the environmental, socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors that influence how people choose to manage land and resource degradation and will develop 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, will be consulted. Applications in European and non-European study sites will be conducted. LEDDRA will examine various policies that contribute to or detract from land degradation and it will 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/> will incorporate 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.

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