

## **NEW HORIZONS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF SOILS AND LAND: ACTIONS NEEDED AT THE INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS**

**Hans Hurni**

*Centre for Development and Environment, University of Berne, Steigerhubelstrasse 3, 3008 Berne, Switzerland. (hans.hurni@cde.unibe.ch)*

This presentation is a conceptual contribution to sustainable soil and land management and an assessment of the potential benefits of action at the national and international levels. It has been derived from theory and participatory workshops involving international and interdisciplinary specialists.

The term ‘Sustainable use of soils and land’ is a new paradigm developed as a framework for inducing action by stakeholders at multiple levels, from land users to administrative, industrial and political levels. A first paradigm shift moved from technical to social, economic and political solutions. Another paradigm shift involved the realisation that even at the national and international levels, stakeholders have an important role to play. The major challenge faced today is that the cumulative effect of numerous small degradation processes at the local level amount to a global threat. Hence national governments are confronted with the need to support farmers in the actions they take to combat land degradation, because the society, including the directly affected populations, will otherwise have to bear the costs of widespread destruction of this vital natural resource.

The need for a multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach opens ‘new horizons’ for international and national action. For example, at the 17th World Congress of Soil Sciences (WCSS) of the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) held in Bangkok in August 2002, the IUSS General Assembly endorsed a ‘World Soils Agenda’, based on a discussion of international actions for the sustainable use of soils. This initiative was launched by the IUSS Working Group ‘IASUS: International Actions for the Sustainable Use of Soils’, drawing upon the expertise of a core group of scientists and policy-makers concerned about sustainable land management (SLM, cf. Hurni and Meyer, eds, 2002).

The World Soils Agenda addresses three major themes, and formulates tasks for institutions concerned with policy, research and implementation at national and international levels. The first theme is ‘science, monitoring and evaluation’, where the need for a reassessment of soil and land degradation, the definition of impact indicators, and principles of SLM are specified. The second theme relates to