

Rehabilitation of Desertified Environment in the Negev, Israel

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ABSTRACT

The south part of Israel, the Negev, is considered as a man induced desert. In the past this dryland environment had known periods of economic prosperity. Large a mount of ruins of agricultural settlements are spread all over the Negev (1000 B.C – 700 A.D.).

The agricultural sites were gradually abandoned and the permanent residents left, due to social and political changes in the region. Mismanagement of soil and water resources, unmaintenance of the ancient farms, and uncontrolled grazing had led to desertification processes.

Rehabilitation of the degraded environment is based on the management of soil and water resources. Watershed planning, soil conservation, runoff water harvesting based on ancient methods, for dryland afforestation and biomass production and controlled grazing are basic methods for the rehabilitation of non arable land. Most desertified arid regions are unsuitable for agriculture. Land reclamation for agriculture development is limited to sites of high land capability. Various methods of recycling irrigation water and conserving soil and water are carried out in the field.

Rehabilitation and sustainable development of degraded watersheds for improving life quality, pasture improvement and food production is achieved through research, demonstration and monitoring programs. Local and international groups are involved in that effort. The knowledge gained in the Negev is shared with other countries which face similar challenges.