

LITHUANIA

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Main problems regarding land degradation in Lithuania

Water and, in some circumstances, wind erosion are the main factors causing land degradation in Lithuania.

According to the data of the State Land Planning Institute, all soils in Lithuania have been studied and soil maps compiled at the scale of 1:100000. About 14 % of agricultural land is affected by erosion, which causes damage to the valuable layer and fertility of arable lands. Most of the lands affected by erosion caused by water and wind are in the western and eastern parts of Lithuania.

Damage caused by water erosion is very diversified: washing of the fertile soil layer and nutrients from slopes, destruction of crops on eroded slopes, erosion of trench slope roads, sanding of trench beds, silting of water bodies and water pollution. One of the measures to prevent erosion of arable land is the implementation of certain crop rotation systems. Establishing shelter belts of surface water bodies would also help to slow down the erosion process, especially on eroded slopes.

Impoverishment of arable land is conditioned by the choice of irrational way of farming, not taking into account the peculiarities of a specific area. An important measure to avoid impoverishment of arable land in protected and ecologically sensitive areas is ecologic farming based on modern environment-friendly technologies. In 2004, the area of certified ecological farms reached 42,96 ha or over 1% of the total agricultural land in the country.

With the changing economic and social conditions in Lithuania, less land is used for agricultural purposes. This trend is especially prominent in the regions with large areas of infertile land. Afforestation of low-value agricultural land not only helps protect biological diversity, ground and surface waters and to absorb carbon dioxide, but also reduces erosion caused by water and wind.

Ratification and Current Status of UNCCD

The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania (the Seimas) ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (the UNCCD) on 3 July 2003 (by adopting Law No. IX-1684).

Regional Implementation Annex V intended for Central and Eastern Europe is in force in the Republic of Lithuania. The above Annex stipulates 8 region-specific conditions under which the following 3 interrelated spheres should be relevant for the implementation of the provisions of the Convention:

- soil erosion caused by water and wind;
- impoverishment of arable land.

The Coordinating Authority of the UNCCD implementation is the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania. At national level, the fields regulated by the Convention are assigned to the competence of the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Environment is responsible for the policy of protection of environment components and the Ministry of Agriculture covers the management of processes affecting soil.

Relevant activities falling within the UNCCD scope are integrated into national strategies and corresponding implementation measures. The activities of implementing the fields regulated by the Convention in Lithuania are defined in the following legal acts:

- Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania for 2004-2008;
- Rural Development Plan for 2004-2006;
- Woodland Increase Programme for 2004-2020.
- National Long-term Development Strategy (2002). The Strategy describes the vision of the Lithuanian State which provides for the following: „Ecological farming measures in line with the EU directives will ensure the development of environment-friendly farming, the preservation and increase of natural resources.“
- National Sustainable Development Strategy (2003). The Strategy provides a comprehensive assessment of soil processes, defines important tasks and measures of implementation regulated by the Convention:
 - *soil erosion caused by water and wind*: „in ecologically sensitive areas (karst region, hilly regions) to farm applying ecological and environment-friendly traditional methods, to develop anti-erosion farming measures and to plant anti-erosion plants.“
 - *impoverishment of arable land*: „to provide economic support for the development of ecological farms, to promote scientific research in how to increase the effectiveness of ecological farming and the activities of consulting companies and to promote a more active use of products grown in ecological farms.“
 - *increasing of forested areas*: „to forest defensive strips of fields and water bodies, to increase afforestation in Lithuania by 3% by afforesting infertile land.“
- Agricultural and Rural Development Strategy (2000). The Strategy defines agricultural and rural development trends for 200-2006, agricultural and rural development goals, principles and priorities.
- Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania (2005-2007). The Strategic Plan lists strategic objectives related to the protection of environment components (including soil) – to ensure the proper quality of environment for the Lithuanian population taking into account the norms and standards of the European Union; to ensure rational use of natural resources (including forests) and their further reproduction, to preserve biological diversity, natural heritage values and uniqueness of the landscape.
- Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania (2005-2007). The Strategic Plan mentions the strategic objective related to the management of the processes affecting soil – to promote environment protection and ecological farming promoting biological diversity and preserving the landscape.
- Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Land (1994, 2004 version in force);
- Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Environmental Monitoring (1997, 2003 version in force);
- Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Agricultural and Rural Development (2002);
- Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Water (1997),
- Order of the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania on the Requirements of Good Farming Practices (2004).

From 2004 to 2006 the Government of Lithuania in collaboration with UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and GEF (Global Environment Facility) has been running out a project on Lithuanian National Capacity Self-Assessment for Global Environment Management. The analysis was concentrated on three thematic spheres – climate change, biological diversity and land degradation. The primary objective of the project is to identify and assess capacity gaps.

The project results show the main barriers in the implementation of the UNCCD:

- Lack of Integrated Soil Research Programme;
- Soil monitoring has no comprehensive and integrated approach;
- Insufficient capacity and financial resources.

The meeting, held on the initiative of the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania regarding the implementation of the UNCCD in Lithuania on 23 May 2005, discussed the relevance of the spheres regulated for Lithuania by the Convention. With the consent of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, it was decided that in 2005-2006 in the context of the Convention, Lithuania was not deemed to be „an affected state.“