



A CENTURY OF INSPIRING LESSONS

A Message from the President of Iceland Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson

As the global community faces new threats in the form of food insecurity, water shortages and climate change, which could lead to destruction on a scale never before seen and spell the end of life-styles that have been with us for generations, it is only natural that people ask: What can we do?

Increasingly, attention is turning to the ecosystem services offered by systematic restoration of degraded land and the resistance that healthy vegetation can raise against destructive forces. Iceland's experience in this field is a valuable resource, a reservoir of knowledge on which leaders and academics all over the world can draw.

A century ago, Icelandic visionaries realised that it was necessary to make a stand against soil erosion and land degradation. What at first seemed almost a futile gesture soon gave grounds for hope, and in the fullness of time the passionate energies of those pioneers became the basis of a national campaign.

For longer than other countries, Iceland has been working systematically at halting the destructive forces and reclaiming the vegetation cover, creating fertile enclaves in barren areas and turning back the advance of the desert sand. It is a remarkable history of deliberate efforts and scientific work, and the success has attracted international acclaim.

When systematic land reclamation began in Iceland, our people and the forces of nature had encroached on the environment without hindrance for a millennium, devastating a large part of the vegetation and the soils, creating what gradually became Europe's largest desert.

The nation chose to make a new departure, and the results are now, at the beginning of a new century, a cause for national pride; lessons to be shared with others.

What took a century in Iceland must now be globally accomplished in a decade.

Our story provides an inspiration of hope, can help to strengthen the crucial role of soil and vegetation in global sustainability, linking land care with climate, biodiversity, water, food security, poverty reduction and peace.

This instructive saga now appears in an English version, based on the publication which marked in 2007 the centenary of soil conservation and restoration of land quality in Iceland and coincided with an International Forum on Soil, Society and Global Change held in the country.

The contribution of Roger Crofts to the editing of this English version is particularly welcome, since collaboration between Icelandic specialists and this renowned scholar and enthusiast has long been vital for the development of successful soil conservation strategies.

I hope that the book will prove instructive and inspiring and serve as a declaration of our desire to collaborate with nations and partners all over the world.

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