

**Proceedings of the Fifth International
Conference on Desert Development**

Desert Development: The Endless Frontier

VOLUME I



August 12-17, 1996

International Center for Arid and Semiarid Land Studies

Office of International Affairs

Texas Tech University

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**Texas Tech University
August 12-17, 1996**

**Edited by
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PREFACE

The one-third of the world's land mass that is classified as arid or semiarid is characterized by one of the singularities of the world's climate: a scarcity of water. Within that unifying characteristic, though, is a wide range in rainfall, from 800 mm at the wet end of the subhumid zone to 25 mm at the dry end of the hyperarid zone. The International Desert Development Commission was established to foster research and education that would contribute to sustainable development of those dry regions in which live more than 15 percent of the world's population. An important part of the education function of the Commission is to convene international conferences for the exchange of information, to encourage cooperation within the global community of scholars, and to disseminate the research presented at the conclaves. These two volumes are the report of the Fifth International Conference on Desert Development. Previous conferences were held in Egypt, China and Mexico. The 1999 conference will be held in Cairo, Egypt.

At the fifth conference, the Commission decided to change its name to the International Dry Lands Development Commission, to reflect the broader charge that the Commission has assumed. Desert development remains a major focus, however, and is the theme of the Cairo conference.

Sustainable development of the dry lands demands a multifaceted approach. It requires recognition that neither technical expertise nor social skills, alone, are enough. Accordingly, the papers in these proceedings, arranged in two volumes, present many strategies, from those for survival in deserts to rehabilitation of mined wastelands in India and China. The unifying theme in all of the five conferences to date has been adaptation to arid climates and learning how to make that adaptation sustainable. In 1951, when Unesco began its global arid lands project, the dry lands were still largely a mystery, romanticized as the last challenge of the frontiersman and feared as the trackless wasteland that swallowed people without a trace. In 1996, thanks to the Unesco program and a rapid expansion of research, we know much more of the opportunities and hazards of arid land sustainable development. And we realize that while some lands should be reserved in their natural state for posterity, others can lead the way to developing new sources of energy to replace or supplement consumption of fossil fuels, prosperous urban settlements based on a healthful and attractive environment, and the high photosynthetic potential available for food production. The future of arid lands is indeed bright, and human insatiable thirst for knowledge of the environment assures that these dry lands will continue to be an endless frontier for research.

The Editors
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West Texas Museum Association
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