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Foreword

Fertile soils are an essential building block for human existence on Earth. The degradation of soils and land, in this regard, poses significant challenges for the well-being and food security of all the people around the world. Moreover, soils provide not only food, fiber, and many types of biomass we use, but also a wide range of other essential ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration, water purification, cultural, and esthetic values. Unfortunately, in the Anthropocene, our age of mankind, the degradation of natural ecosystems, including land and soils, has rapidly increased, posing daunting challenges to achieving sustainable development and poverty reduction. Degradation of ecosystems is posing environmental challenges and is leading to the loss of land productivity—which in turn leads to conversion of high-value biomes—such as forests—to low-value biomes—especially in low-income countries, where majority of the rural poor heavily depend on natural resources. The resulting scarcities are often exacerbated by prohibiting and dispossessing people from access to land and fertile soils. Hence, sustainable soil management and responsible land governance have a great potential for being one of the corner stones of achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Specifically, sustainable land management contributes to achieving several of the SDGs, such as land degradation neutrality and an ambitious climate and biodiversity agenda, as highlighted in the series of Global Soil Week events in Berlin in recent years.

This book on *Economics of Land Degradation and Improvement* provides with valuable knowledge and information both at the global, regional, and national levels on the costs of land degradation and benefits of taking action against land degradation. A key advantage of this book is that it goes beyond the conventional market values of only crop and livestock products lost due to land degradation, but seeks to capture all major terrestrial losses of ecosystem services. Twelve carefully selected national case studies provide rich information about various local contexts of cost of land degradation as evaluated by local communities, drivers of land degradation, and amenable strategies for sustainable land management.

The research presented in the book shows that investments to address land degradation have significant economic payoffs. Next to investments, we have to address the question of adoption of sustainable land management practices and policies. To implement land restoration, we need to understand obstacles within the social, economic, and the political context. The results of this study show that particular attention needs to be paid to tangible local incentives for taking action against land degradation. This requires secure land rights, enhancing extension services, and empowering local communities to manage their natural resources. The identification of implementation pathways through multi-stakeholder processes assumes a particular importance in this regard. This book can serve as a highly valuable resource and reference for policymakers, civil society, researchers, and practitioners.

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