

Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

Summary

By decision 8/COP.11, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification adopted a decision to establish an intergovernmental working group to: (1) establish a science-based definition of land degradation neutrality in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas; (2) develop options relating to arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas that Parties might consider should they strive to achieve land degradation neutrality; and (3) advise the Convention on the implications for its current and future strategy, programmes and the resource requirements.

This report of the IWG presents its main findings, conclusions and recommendations on the follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. The report is submitted to Parties for consideration at COP.12. It is issued as received from the IWG co-chairs without further editing.

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1. Introduction

1. In recognition of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) contained in *The future we want* (UNGA Resolution 66/288) which, *inter alia*, calls upon Member States to strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world in the context of sustainable development, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) adopted decision 8/COP.11 to establish an Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) to follow up on the outcomes related to land degradation neutrality.

2. The IWG was given three specific tasks, namely to: (1) establish a science-based definition of land degradation neutrality in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas; (2) develop options relating to arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas that Parties might consider should they strive to achieve land degradation neutrality; and (3) advise the Convention on the implications for its current and future strategy, programmes and the resource requirements.

3. In establishing this IWG, a number of Contracting Parties were concerned that it was potentially premature to reflect on the implications of the expected Sustainable Development Goals before they were adopted and it was therefore stressed that, in undertaking its work, the IWG should also take note of the following, *inter alia*: (a) The ongoing process of elaborating the post-2015 development agenda, including, *inter alia*, the discussions in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) called for at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development; (b) Relevant economic studies and work undertaken by the Science-Policy Interface, as appropriate; and (c) The importance of identifying synergies to avoid duplication among the Rio conventions, other international bodies, and agencies addressing environment and development issues.

4. The COP also decided that the IWG should prepare a report to be submitted to the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties no later than 60 days before the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties and that this report should be sent for consideration by the Committee on Science and Technology and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention prior to the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties. In accordance with the above terms of reference, this Information Note contains the report of the IWG which presents its main findings, conclusions and recommendations on the follow-up to the outcomes of Rio+20. This report is submitted to Parties for consideration at COP.12 and has been issued as received from the IWG co-chairs without further editing.

5. Decision 8/COP.11 further specified that the IWG would consist of a maximum of five representatives from each region, nominated by the respective regional groups on the basis of nominations by national governments. Following the nomination of the regional representatives, the IWG met for the first time in Brussels, Belgium on 10-11 February 2014 to establish its terms of reference and programme of work. During this first meeting, the IWG appointed Mr. Nicholas Hanley of the European Union and Mr. Bongani Simon Masuku of Swaziland as their co-chairs. In addition, it was agreed that three task forces would be formed to address the three specific tasks contained in paragraph 1 of decision 8/COP.11. Each task force was led by its own coordinator: Task force 1 on the definition was led by Mr. German Kust of Russia, Task force 2 on the options was led by Ms. Jia Xiaoxia of China, and Task force 3 on the

implications was led by Ms. Belsis Llorente of Cuba. The IWG met again in Beijing, China on 16-18 July 2014 and in Rome, Italy on 18-20 March 2015 for a total of three meetings.

6. The members of Task Forces 1 and 2 corresponded by email to produce working documents for discussion at the second meeting of the IWG in Beijing. Subsequently, a three month consultation period from 01 August to 31 October 2014 was opened in order to solicit comments from the UNCCD Parties, CSOs and Observers to get a broader sounding on the working documents of Task Forces 1 and 2. During that period, comments were received from nine country Parties and the Committee on Science and Technology's Science and Policy Interface. Prior to the third meeting of the IWG in Rome, and taking into account the comments received, the coordinators of Task Forces 1 and 2 revised their working documents and presented the way forward in order to achieve consensus. At the third meeting, the coordinator of Task Force 3 circulated its working document for discussion.

7. Before presenting the report of the IWG, the co-chairs would like to draw your attention to a number of issues. The first of these relates to the status of the SDGs. During the period of the IWG's work, considerable progress was made in the United Nation's process taking place in New York regarding the elaboration of a set of SDGs. The IWG has taken note of the results of the UN's Open Working Group and the recommendations of UN Secretary General. At the time of finalizing this report, the SDGs were still in their preparatory phase. However, it appeared clear that the proposed inclusion of a target on Land Degradation Neutrality under the proposed SDG 15 was likely to be agreed. As the UN General Assembly is expected to approve the SDGs as part of the post-2015 development agenda in September 2015, the reserved language as to the status of this potential target in our report will therefore become outdated prior to COP12 in October 2015. In considering the findings of our report and its recommendations, the COP will be fully apprised of the final outcomes on the SDGs.

8. The second key issue relates to the scope of the science-based definition that we have formulated in the context of the first task. As you will see, the IWG's definition contains text in square brackets referring to either "affected areas" or to "arid, semi-arid and dry, sub-humid areas". This arose from a difference of opinion, on the part of the IWG members, which was unable to be resolved by any alternative formulation. The majority of the IWG considered that the definition did not require these square brackets since they considered that the definition proposed was applicable to all land types. A minority of IWG members argued that such a universal definition was going beyond the mandate of the group and that of the Convention which is restricted in the Convention Text to "arid, semi-arid and dry, sub-humid areas". The majority view was that a universal definition without the text in brackets was scientifically sound and in no way should be seen to be a challenge to the mandate of the Convention. Furthermore, the majority felt that it is clearly up to Contracting Parties to apply the definition at their discretion to areas beyond the scope of the Convention. The COP is therefore invited to reflect on this issue.

9. Finally, with regard to the IWG's recommendations on Tasks 2 and 3, the IWG sees the need for the Convention to work closely with other organizations in order to contribute to a collective response to the global challenge of land degradation and to achieving land degradation neutrality. The recommendations under Task 3, in particular, call for a "collective partnership" which identifies a key

role for the UNCCD while not suggesting that the Convention should expand its remit to an exclusive role in addressing land degradation neutrality in all areas.

2. A science-based definition of land degradation neutrality in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas

Preamble

10. In accordance with decision 8/COP.11, and consistent with the text of the Convention, the IWG has produced a science-based definition of land degradation neutrality (LDN) in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas for consideration by Parties at COP.12. This definition is suggested by the IWG as equally applicable to other areas.

11. LDN, in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, as a goal to maintain or improve the condition of land, is applicable at the national, sub-national and local levels taking into consideration the circumstances and capacities of each Party. LDN may contribute to maintaining or improving ecosystem services for the social, economic, and environmental benefit of current and future generations. LDN occurs as the result of a combination of avoiding or reducing the rate of land degradation and increasing the rate of recovery. LDN can occur naturally or due to adequate land management.

Definition

12. Land Degradation Neutrality [in affected areas][in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas] is a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources, necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security, remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems.

3. Options relating to arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas that Parties might consider should they strive to achieve land degradation neutrality

Preamble

13. Taking note of the final report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant studies, the IWG has produced the following recommendation on the options that Parties might wish to consider should they strive to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) [in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid], [and at their discretion, other areas]. This can be achieved by the prevention of land degradation and the adoption of sustainable land management and recovery of degraded land.

14. The options for achieving LDN, as defined by the IWG, are as numerous and diverse as the contexts in which they might be applied. The most appropriate combination of options will vary depending upon (i) the drivers, types, degree and extent of land degradation; (ii) the underlying potential and resilience of land resources; and (iii) national circumstances, priorities and capacities.

A. Management options at the national level

- Prevent, avoid or minimize land degradation. Preventing future land degradation can be addressed through, inter alia, (1) national and local land use planning that fully accounts for the potential and resilience of land resources and (2) the adoption of sustainable land management practices in a given location.
- Rehabilitate or restore degraded land to improve environmental quality and to support sustainable food production by reducing the drivers and impacts of current land degradation processes and by the implementation of projects and other measures for rehabilitation and recovery.

B. Policy options at the national level

- Integrate LDN into the current NAP
- Integrate LDN into new NAP's developed to align with the next 10 year strategy
- Develop a LDN implementation plan that complements the current NAP

C. Options for Operationalizing LDN at the National Level

Achieving LDN [in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas][and at the discretion of Parties in other areas] may be facilitated by the following non-exhaustive list of interlinked activities. Parties may consider that these measures are of value in implementing the options outlined above for achieving LDN.

1. Define the spatial scales and functional units for LDN implementation.
2. Assess the type, extent and diagnose the degree of land degradation to establish baselines.
3. Identify the drivers of land degradation and ways to reduce or eliminate them.
4. Identify and implement land management practices based on the assessments, diagnosis and persistence of drivers.
5. Develop and implement the appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems including methodologies and indicators for assessing progress towards LDN and its benefits.
6. Establish policy and national governance frameworks as appropriate that put in place, as necessary, the legal instruments, institutional and technical capacities, incentive mechanisms, and facilitate engagement and partnerships.
7. Incorporate LDN recommended options into national sustainable development strategies and other relevant plans and programmes to ensure multi-sectoral cooperation, including synergies with biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation [and mitigation], and the adequate flow of financial resources. The development of a national integrated financial strategy may be a useful mechanism for achieving LDN.

8. Leverage and share traditional and local knowledge, as well as modern technologies, best practices, experiences and lessons learned from relevant projects and programmes, including drought resilience, preparedness and mitigation.
9. Develop comprehensive public awareness and education strategies at all levels to effectively promote and communicate sustainable land use and management with all stakeholders, especially youth and rural women who play a critical role in enhancing sustainable agriculture and rural development as well as local and indigenous communities. This could include both traditional and non-traditional education strategies.

4. Advice to the Convention on the implications for its current and future strategy, programmes and the resource requirements

Preamble

15. The third task in decision 8/COP.11 mandates the IWG to advise on the implications of LDN for the Convention's current and future strategy, programmes and resource requirements. At the time of the drafting of these recommendations, the IWG was not aware of the possible SDGs and possible targets that might be related to LDN and their means of implementation and monitoring frameworks that may be agreed by the UNGA. In considering this element, the IWG recalls to the COP that the objectives of the Convention and its existing operation are fully consistent with the objective of LDN.

Implications for the Current Strategy

16. The current strategy of the Convention has only two years left to run. Given that it is consistent with the objectives of LDN but does not fulfill all of the components of LDN, the IWG sees no useful purpose in amending the strategy at this stage.

Implications for the Future Work and Strategy of the UNCCD

17. The IWG considers that the adoption of an SDG incorporating a LDN target by the UNGA would represent a challenge and opportunity for the Convention to improve its effectiveness in assisting Parties in their implementation of the objectives of the Convention in the pursuit of LDN. In organizing its future work, the Convention has a number of options, including the following:

- (a) prepare a new ten year strategy that includes LDN to follow on from the current strategy 2008-2018
- (b) in lieu of a ten year strategy, develop at each COP work programmes with the length of each programme determined based on the objectives and the nature of the activities

18. In the current ten year strategy, the Convention has sought to work in partnership with other bodies whose objectives are supportive of the implementation of the Convention objectives to halt desertification and land degradation. The IWG recommends that the Convention should, in the event

that the UNGA establishes a LDN target and timeline, explore how it could further develop its partnerships with other bodies to contribute to this objective.

19. With respect to the relation between the Convention and the Parties, the IWG believes that the current system of NAPs should be retained as an appropriate way for countries to strive to achieve LDN. However, if Parties decide that they wish to establish a national LDN plan or include this within a national sustainable development plan, the Convention should be prepared to accept the submissions by Parties of such plans in lieu of a stand-alone NAP.

Implications for Programmes (including CST, CRIC and the SPI)

20. The implementation of LDN by the Parties should be country-driven, aspirational and voluntary. The UNCCD and subsidiary bodies (CST-SPI, CRIC and the GM) and partners may play an important role in supporting countries to develop and implement effective plans and programmes for achieving LDN.

21. Based on the options for operationalizing LDN at the national level, the CST-SPI, CRIC and the GM are well positioned in addressing LDN, in accordance with their respective mandates, in particular by providing the scientific and technical support for Parties. In the planning of resources for the next biennium the COP may give consideration of adequate resources for the allocation to the convention bodies to fulfill this task.

22. There is also a need to explore ways on how to develop efficient cooperation between the SPI and other relevant scientific bodies such as the IPBES, the SBSTTA, the IPCC and the GEF-STAP.

Implications for Resource Requirements

23. Future national and sub-national efforts on achieving the LDN goal need the appropriate means of implementation, i.e. a) first and foremost better use and refocusing of existing resources, b) additional, new financial resources, c) [reference to or cut and paste para 73 of the future we want] [technology transfer and capacity building for developing countries and economies in transition on favorable terms including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed upon][access to technologies and capacity building for developing countries and economics in transition], and d) awareness raising campaigns.

24. Land degradation, of the three environmental problems addressed by the Rio Conventions, is the one that historically has received the least direct financial resources. For example, in GEF-6 focal area related to land degradation is the one that has less resource allocated under the System of Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) used by recipient countries at national levels: [40% of resources correspond to climate change, 45% to biodiversity and only 15% to land degradation.]

25. In order to adopt new commitments and successful implementation of LDN by interested parties, a substantial increase of financial resources is needed. This could be met by one or more of the following options:

1) Multilateral funding options:

- A new LDN fund could be created within the UNCCD framework to cover the financial requirements of Affected Parties, especially for capacity building and technology transfers for SLM and restoration activities, including land-based adaptation issues.
- For GEF-7 there could be a substantial increase in resources for land degradation, at least triple the amount of current available resources. This shall be properly reflected in a decision at COP-12.
- The Green Climate Fund could also be an opportunity for financing climate change adaptation actions, inter alia, those related to food security and SLM which can be strategically linked to LDN implementation plans.
- The financial mechanism to be implemented for the post-2015 development agenda and SDGs also could support activities for LDN.

2) Bilateral aid – Developed countries could continue and increase their funding of development aid to affected Parties. Already substantial elements of existing funding are committed to LDN-positive investments. LDN implementation plans/programmes could provide an appropriate planning tool for attracting future funding.

3) Private sector investments – In many affected countries, the private sector both nationally and internationally has and continues to make substantial investments in land and agricultural enterprises. Government and municipal instruments as well as initiatives should be used to encourage responsible investments and practices by the private sector that contribute to achieving LDN. Public-private partnerships should be further developed to attract additional funding.

26. Domestic government contributions are also complementary. For example, LDN could be used as an opportunity to transform legislative and regulatory frameworks and financial and other incentive mechanisms to improve land planning and governance, foster SLM and ecosystem restoration activities at the appropriate scale.

5. List of IWG Meeting Participants

AFRICA (Annex I)

Algeria (Abdelkader Kader Khelifa); Côte d'Ivoire (Yao Koffi Bernard); Ethiopia (Berhanu Ayalew Bezabeh); Swaziland (Bongani Simon Masuku)

ASIA (Annex II)

Lebanon (Talal Darwish); China (Xiaoxia Jia); Samoa (Faainoini Laulala, Filisita Heather); Philippines (Silvino Quevedo Tejada, Karen Salandanan-Bautista); Iran (Hossein Badripour)

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN (Annex III)

Colombia (Andrés Comba Morales, Haendel Sebastián Rodríguez González); Mexico (Armando López Santos); Cuba (Belsis Llorente Díaz); Brazil (Saulo A. Ceolin, Felipe Augusto Ramos de Alencar da Costa); Grenada (Raymond Baptiste)

CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE (Annex V)

Armenia (Ashot Vardevanyan); Georgia (Nino Chikovani); Ukraine (Yuriy Kolmaz); Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hamid Custovic); Russia (German Kust)

WESTERN EUROPE & OTHER GROUPS (WEOG)

Australia (Russel Philips); Unites States of America (Jeffrey Herrick); Italy (Anna Luise); European Commission (Nicholas Hanley); Iceland (Jon Erlingur Jonasson)