

## Expert meeting on a land degradation indicator (SDG target 15.3) 25-26 February 2016 held in Washington, DC

### Summary of Main Outcomes

Over 60 experts from organizations, institutions, governments and the private sector, concerned with the implementation of SDG 15 and its target 15.3, aiming at halting and reversing land degradation trends, participated in the meeting (see list of participants below). Opening remarks by the co-organizers offered an overview and framed the discussion for the two-day meeting. A presentation by the UNCCD's Science Policy Interface (SPI) on the Land Degradation Neutrality conceptual framework and a report from UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) on the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs) process further guided the participants in their deliberations. Just before the meeting, the indicator for SDG target 15.3 "**proportion of land that is degraded over total land area**" was granted "green" status by the IAEG-SDGs and will now likely be approved by the UNSC at its 47<sup>th</sup> session to be held in New York from 08-11 March 2016.

From the outset, all participants agreed that monitoring and reporting on this indicator should primarily be based on national official data sources and take advantage of existing reporting mechanisms. The participants came to a consensus that the three sub-indicators already adopted by the UNCCD<sup>1</sup> (land cover/land cover change, land productivity and carbon stocks above and below ground), in conjunction with other relevant indicators (such as FAO's deliveries on LADA<sup>2</sup>) and contextualized with information at the national and sub-national level, provide the information needed to monitor and report on this indicator. The participants also agreed that the corresponding data sets to complement and support existing and new national data and information would come from multiple sources, including statistics and estimated data for administrative or national boundaries, ground measurements and remote sensing.

Comments during the pre-meeting consultation and discussions at the meeting provided valuable inputs to the draft technical guidance document provided by the co-organizers as did breakout sessions with four working groups focused on i) land cover/land cover change; ii) land productivity; iii) carbon stocks, and iv) implementation and validation at country level. In sum, it was agreed that the indicator (15.3.1) and sub-indicators proposed could never fully capture the complexity of land degradation processes and so there will be a need to supplement these globally applicable indicator and sub-indicators with national or sub-national indicators, data and assessments to more fully account for national circumstances and contexts.

Participants concluded that a framework and set of guiding principles for monitoring and reporting on SDG indicator 15.3.1 would be most appropriate, and a step wise approach was proposed:

- **Setting Baselines.** Determination of the initial status of the sub-indicators in absolute values. This would include: 1) the preparation of base land cover information which builds on standard land cover ontology (e.g., LCCS/LCML); 2) the establishment of a baseline for land productivity (e.g., NPP/NDVI); and 3) the establishment of a baseline for carbon stocks, above

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Science/Monitoring-Assessment/Documents/Decision22-COP11.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/ai555e/ai555e00.htm>

and below ground, with an emphasis on soil organic carbon below ground and building on the IPCC's work on carbon above ground.

- **Detecting Change** in each of the sub-indicators, including the identification of areas subject to change and their validation or evaluation by a participatory national inventory of land degradation, particularly where change in two or three of the sub-indicators coincide or overlap spatially.
- **Deriving the Indicator** (15.3.1) by summing all those areas subject to change, whose conditions are considered negative by national authorities (i.e., land degradation) using the "framework and guiding principles" to support countries in their measurement and evaluation of changes within each sub-indicator and their combination.
- **National Data** and information to employ supplementary indicators at the country level covering other relevant biophysical, governance and socio-economic conditions, including the use of participatory national inventories on existing land management systems, characteristics and land resources status. These national inventories could be used to interpret the changes detected, assess their causes, and identify management interventions that address land degradation.

This approach would link the assessment of SDG target 15.3 to that of targets 2.4 (sustainable agriculture) and 15.2 (sustainable forest management) by providing useful information for the evaluation of sustainable land (forest) management systems, their spatial extent and distribution as well as for integrated and sustainable land use planning at multiple scales.

### **Follow Up Actions**

1. The technical guidance document "***Framework and guiding principles on the use of a land degradation indicator***" will be revised by the co-organizers based on the outcomes of the meeting and presented as a **DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION**. This draft will be made available by 25 March 2016 in order to contribute to the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the IAEG-SDGs, CBD SBSTTA 20 and other near-term processes. The participants agreed that further work was needed to provide a standardized approach to derive the sub-indicators and further refine the framework and set of guiding principles in order to help build monitoring and reporting capacities at the national level.
2. In terms of broader communication, the co-organizers will produce a non-technical companion note and produce fact sheets for the sub-indicators for interested parties, country representatives and other relevant constituencies.
3. The participants requested the co-organizers to ask the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) secretariat to task the International Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) to develop further guidance on monitoring and reporting on soil organic carbon stocks. This was one of the areas of collaboration agreed during the first joint ITPS/UNCCD-SPI meeting at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Soil Week (April 2015) and welcomed by the GSP at its 3<sup>rd</sup> Assembly in June 2015 (see GSPPA: III/2015/2 Add.2).
4. The co-organizers, in consultation with the participants, will work on the development of a roadmap, work plan and the terms of reference to implement indicator 15.3.1. Based on these inputs, the co-organizers and relevant partners will work with the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) secretariat to develop a concept note containing a proposal for options on a possible

global partnership to assist countries with monitoring and reporting on progress towards SDG target 15.3. If appropriate, elements of the concept note could be shared informally with the IAEG-SDGs members at the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting under agenda item 7.

5. FAO will consider organizing a similar expert meeting on the indicator for SDG target 2.4 ***"Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture"***.

### **List of Participants**

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