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Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels

Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality

Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and land degradation neutrality

Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 3/COP.14, the Conference of the Parties requested the secretariat, the Global Mechanism (GM) and appropriate United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification bodies, within their respective mandates, to continue to: (a) develop partnerships to support the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality (LDN); (b) contribute to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; (c) develop the LDN Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP) and support Parties in implementing and periodically reviewing and monitoring progress; and (d) promote synergies and knowledge-sharing among Parties participating in the LDN TSP.

The decision also invites Parties who have not yet done so to formulate voluntary LDN targets, as appropriate, and those that have committed to LDN targets to implement measures to accelerate their achievement. This report describes the actions taken by the secretariat and the GM in response to the requests contained in decision 3/COP.14, and ends with conclusions and recommendations for consideration by Parties at the twentieth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention.



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I. Background

1. By decision 3/COP.12, the Conference of the Parties (COP) reaffirmed that striving to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3 is a strong vehicle for driving the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and achieving land degradation neutrality (LDN). The decision requested the secretariat and appropriate UNCCD bodies to take the initiative with relevant organizations and stakeholders to seek cooperation to achieve SDG target 15.3. In decision 3/COP.13, the COP invited Parties to formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN and to use the monitoring and evaluation approach adopted in decision 22/COP.11 to monitor, evaluate and communicate progress towards achieving the LDN target.

2. By its decision 7/COP.13, the COP adopted the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework with a vision of a future that avoids, minimizes, and reverses desertification/land degradation and mitigates the effects of drought in affected areas at all levels and strives to achieve a land degradation-neutral world consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In accordance with the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and by leveraging partnerships to support efforts to achieve LDN, Parties have recognized the importance of integrating SDG 15 and related target 15.3 to enhance the implementation of the Convention.

3. By decision 3/COP.14, the Parties' main request to the secretariat was to continue to advance the LDN Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP) and develop partnerships to support the implementation of the Convention and national voluntary LDN, taking note of, as appropriate, the Group on Earth Observations LDN Initiative, the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the Changwon Initiative, the Ankara Initiative, the Peace Forest Initiative and other complementary initiatives, including national, sub-regional and regional scientific bodies, to provide support to the Parties. This document provides a high-level summary of the activities of the secretariat and the GM taken in response to the decision as well as conclusions and recommendations on future work priorities. For more detailed information, refer to ICCD/CRIC(20)/5.

II. Land degradation neutrality target setting and related implementation efforts

4. In order to support countries in defining and implementing SDG target 15.3 at the national level during 2020–2021, the secretariat and GM continued to provide comprehensive technical and financial support to countries that have committed to setting their national voluntary LDN targets through the LDN TSP¹ in collaboration with 18 international partners.

5. Countries that have recently joined the LDN TSP have benefited from the numerous knowledge sharing products containing the lessons learned and good practices accumulated from the participation of other countries, helping to further promote synergies and knowledge-sharing among Parties. For more detailed information, refer to ICCD/CRIC(19)/2.

6. As of December 2021, the LDN TSP has a total of 129 participating countries, 106 of which have successfully completed this voluntary process and 100 have published their national LDN reports on the UNCCD website.²

7. In order to contribute to the achievement of SDG target 15.3, as specified in the LDN targets adopted by country Parties, the GM has continued engaging with key technical and financing partners and has increased its support to country Parties to translate their LDN targets into LDN implementation activities on the ground through the development of gender responsive transformative projects and programmes (TPPs) that address

¹ <<https://www.unccd.int/actions/ldn-target-setting-programme>>.

² <<https://knowledge.unccd.int/home/country-information/countries-with-voluntary-ldn-targets>>.

desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) among other areas. Achieving LDN will also accelerate progress towards achieving many other SDGs, particularly those on poverty reduction, food, water, energy and human security, environmental protection, sustainable use of natural resources, economic growth and gender equality.

8. Document ICCD/CRIC(20)/5 includes further details on the results achieved to date in this regard and discusses several areas that could be improved in order to support a more dynamic national enabling environment and reach higher efficiency and effectiveness at scale for both LDN target setting and support for future LDN implementation efforts. Additional information on relevant capacity building, gender mainstreaming and partnership building activities can also be found, respectively, in ICCD/CRIC(20)/6, ICCD/COP(15)/17 and ICCD/COP(15)/4.

III. Partnerships to support the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality

9. The secretariat and the GM have been actively engaging multilateral funding and technical entities in capacity building events to advise their respective staff of some of the technical aspects of LDN, the role of LDN measures as an accelerator for the SDGs in general and SDG target 15.3, in particular, and to facilitate exchanges with UNCCD national focal points and other stakeholders.

10. The secretariat and the GM have also been collaborating closely with the secretariat of the Global Environment Facility to support UNCCD implementation activities as well as an enabling environment that promotes synergies with the other Rio conventions with the aim of fostering co-benefits contributing to the achievement of national priorities within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030.

11. Since its launch at the tenth session of the COP, the Changwon Initiative continues to be a key partnership contributing to various efforts to assist with LDN implementation. The dominant thread connecting much of the Initiative's support was the extensive work to develop and test the concept of LDN. For example, the Changwon Initiative supported the LDN pilot project and the Greening Drylands Partnership – a trilateral partnership between the UNCCD, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Republic of Korea – which ultimately helped to prepare the technical, scientific and political ground for the adoption of LDN. The Initiative continues supporting the LDN TSP and LDN TPP and has facilitated partnership building and the further mainstreaming of LDN and land issues within the global environmental agenda and the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework.

12. The three partners of the Greening Drylands Partnership cooperate on issues related to combatting DLDD; forest and ecosystem restoration in degraded lands and biodiversity conservation; and climate change mitigation and adaptation. By creating an enabling environment, the Greening Drylands Partnership aims to help enhance the livelihoods of affected communities; improve the conditions of the affected ecosystems; protect biodiversity; and further advance efforts in the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

13. Since 2011, the Greening Drylands Partnership has supported 14 projects in testing and fulfilling national voluntary LDN commitments in collaboration with relevant partners, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, governments, civil society organizations and local communities. Field level activities include capacity development for the rehabilitation and restoration of degraded ecosystems, such as drylands, rangelands, forest, peatlands, and wetlands, through sustainable land management measures such as agroforestry and tree planting.

14. Additional information on partnerships to integrate SDG 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN, including those with the Group on Earth Observations LDN Initiative, the Ankara Initiative and the Peace Forest Initiative, is contained in ICCD/COP(15)/4.

IV. High-Level Dialogue on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

15. The High-Level Dialogue on DLDD was held on Monday, 14 June 2021 with a continuation on Friday, 2 July 2021. In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 74/220 and 75/218, the President of the General Assembly convened this High-Level Dialogue to assess the progress made in the fight against DLDD and map the way forward in view of the end of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification and the beginning of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. For more detailed information, refer to ICCD/COP(15)/3.

16. The theme of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2021 was ‘Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development’. The secretariat submitted inputs to the HLPF 2021, including the Convention’s perspective on the land and livelihood impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a brief update on LDN developments for the Secretary General’s SDG Progress Report.

17. The secretariat’s note to the HLPF 2021 outlined some of the pandemic’s socio-economic and environmental impacts on the land-based sectors. Even while these continue to be felt, current trends indicate that there are and will be greater pressures on forest and land resources in many areas. Faced with an increasingly uncertain future, as a global community, it is crucial that we take all the necessary steps to reduce the risk of future pandemics and find ways to recover lost resilience. Protecting and restoring land health and natural ecosystems is crucial for mitigating and coping with multiple global challenges, such as zoonotic disease transmission, food security, biodiversity loss, disaster risks, and climate change. Moreover, sustainable land and water management is a cost-effective means to build forward better. By avoiding future land and ecosystem degradation and reversing past damage, we can accelerate the progress on all 17 SDGs while addressing the risks posed by pandemics, climate change, biodiversity loss, and other global threats.³

18. As the custodian of SDG indicator 15.3.1, the secretariat contributed to the Secretary General’s SDG Progress Report with a brief update on progress towards the implementation of voluntary national LDN targets as follows: as of February 2021, 127 countries and territories had committed to setting voluntary targets for achieving LDN, and 68 countries and territories had already officially endorsed their targets. Overall, commitments to land restoration are estimated to amount to 1 billion hectares, of which 450 million hectares are covered by commitments through LDN targets.⁴

V. Conclusions and recommendations

19. **This high-level overview points to the substantive work in progress by the Parties and Convention bodies on integrating SDG 15 and related target 15.3, which have now been mainstreamed throughout the many of the work streams of the secretariat and the GM, and which are cross-referenced with other Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) documents for easy access to more detailed information. Likewise, the activities and initiatives outlined in this note illustrate the secretariat and GM’s efforts to engage in partnerships and other forms of collaboration to enhance support to the Parties with the implementation of their voluntary national LDN targets.**

20. **When LDN projects and programmes are well-designed, carefully managed and appropriately funded, their implementation can deliver multiple benefits with the**

³ <<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=2718&menu=3170>>.

⁴ <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2021/secretary-general-sdg-report-2021--EN.pdf>>.

potential to act as an accelerator for achieving and an integrator for linking multiple SDGs, as well as a catalyst for attracting sustainable development and climate finance to further the implementation of the Convention.⁵

21. As the lead organization addressing DLDD, the secretariat continues to take the initiative with other relevant agencies and stakeholders, such as United Nations entities, international organizations, financial institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector, to collaborate to achieve SDG target 15.3. The secretariat is actively contributing to numerous activities and programmes with partners as part of the ongoing United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030 which will serve as a catalyst for accelerating progress towards SDG 15, target 15.3, and LDN.

22. With this conclusion, the CRIC at its twentieth session may wish to consider the draft recommendation on integrating SDG 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN, as contained in document ICCD/CRIC(20)/10.

⁵ <<https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/74%20UNGA%20UNCCD%20resolution%20adopted%20by%20the%20GA.doc.pdf>>.