



The UNCCD:
Securing Life on Land
(2016–2017)



FOREWORD BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

In the last two years, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has capitalized on its work to frame land degradation neutrality (LDN), the concept that aims to reach a sustainable balance between the degradation, sustainable management and restoration of land worldwide. This approach has been endorsed in the global goals for sustainable development as target 15.3. This is a potentially “game changing” move. LDN is becoming the organizing principle for the UNCCD and all countries have been invited to establish voluntary LDN targets. At the same time, the role of land management in the adaptation and mitigation of climate change has also been recognized.



However, this needs to be seen in the context of the challenges the world faces. In early 2016 devastating droughts have caused havoc and severe food insecurity in many regions. Land degradation is being recognized as a root cause of poverty and social instability often leading to distressed migration and even conflict as a result of resource scarcity. The challenges are becoming all too real and all too commonplace. Urgent action is needed.

In the coming biennium, UNCCD country Parties, partners and stakeholders are moving to rapidly scale up measures that can support the achievement of land degradation neutrality and build the resilience of the environment and communities to many of the challenges we face. In this brochure, we have set out our plans to support Parties start to achieve their bold ambitions.

It is an important journey. We hope that you can join us.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Barbut". The signature is stylized and includes a horizontal line at the end.

Monique Barbut

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A GLOBAL GOAL: LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY

Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) is a simple idea and a powerful tool. It means securing enough healthy and productive resources by better managing the land we have and bringing back life to the land we have degraded. It means securing economic, social and political resilience and opportunity for millions. From resilience and opportunity comes stability in the face of a huge number of global challenges. It is a vital global goal and a wise investment choice.

The idea of land degradation neutrality is now embedded in the global goals for sustainable development (see <http://www.globalgoals.org/global-goals/life-on-land/>).

The UNCCD Secretariat and the Global Mechanism – its operational arm – are working hand in hand to make the concept of land degradation neutrality a reality by 2030. We will be translating the target into a number of practical tools and providing guidance for Parties and other stakeholders. Our aim is to see the implementation of practical projects gathering pace with tangible positive changes on the ground, particularly in those countries that establish a voluntary LDN target.

We are working to make synergies around land issues a reality. Common indicators that can be used to measure land degradation neutrality at the global level are being rolled out. These are: Land use/cover change, land productivity and carbon stocks – above and below ground. A partnership is being forged so that impact and progress can be easily understood and made visible for better land-use planning and decision making and for reporting under the UNCCD, the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and other global processes.

Establishing a baseline and then measuring progress will be fundamental for driving investment, combating climate change and delivering healthy terrestrial ecosystems. Achieving land degradation neutrality and improving 12 million hectares of degraded land annually up to 2030 would certainly help deliver on the new climate agreement. Already 103 Parties, who submitted Intended National Determined Contributions, included the land use sector for either mitigation or adaptation of climate change.

In 2016, in time for COP22 in Marrakesh, UNCCD will work to better highlight the role of land and soil as a carbon sink and how land degradation neutrality could help communities vulnerable to climate change to adapt. We will follow the IPCC special report on *climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security and GHG fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems*.

We will support efforts to urgently scale up the rehabilitation of degraded land and terrestrial ecosystems and will develop guidance on land as an adaptation measure.



The UNCCD Science-Policy Interface will develop guidance on what LDN means in practice for countries. Meanwhile, an Intergovernmental Working Group has been established to mainstream these developments into the Convention's strategic framework. As a globally agreed target, LDN can be used to galvanize action to address land degradation in all terrestrial ecosystems across entire landscapes. Achieving LDN requires a paradigm shift in land stewardship: from 'degrade-abandon-migrate' to 'protect-sustain-restore'.

This is the rationale that underpins the LDN Target Setting Programme that became operational in spring 2016. Through this programme, the UNCCD's operational arm — the Global Mechanism — is supporting a rapidly growing number of countries that have committed to setting national voluntary LDN targets.

The main objective of the programme that builds on the successful LDN pilot project implemented by 14 LDN champion countries in 2014-15, are to support countries to define national baselines, measures and targets to achieve LDN by 2030 and to identify LDN investment opportunities.

To achieve LDN by 2030, substantial financial resources must be mobilized for land rehabilitation and degradation avoidance. The Global Mechanism, in collaboration with the Mirova-Natixis group, is spearheading and coordinating the development of an independent investment fund that will channel blended finance to bankable projects that contribute to LDN.

The LDN Fund is being structured as a Public-Private Partnership for institutional investors, impact investors, development finance institutions and donors committed to LDN. It is expected to partner with other funds and financial institutions to increase scale and impact of investments on the ground.

LDN Fund investments are expected to follow strict sustainability standards and responsible investment criteria. Land ownership, land tenure, and environmental and social safeguards will be carefully assessed during each investment decision.

The vision behind the LDN Fund is to open up the financial market for the rehabilitation of 12 million hectares of degraded land a year. An exciting project pipeline is already taking shape. It is envisioned that the LDN Fund will be launched in late 2016.



LDN FOR STABILITY AND OPPORTUNITY

LDN can be a big part of the solution for many of the greatest challenges our global society is facing. In a world of resource degradation and increasing climate change impacts, intense droughts, flash floods, landslides or sand and dust storms will become the new norm. Population growth and lack of economic opportunity is accelerating distressed migration and natural resource conflict. Decisive action is needed. Achieving land degradation neutrality can help.

In 2016–2017 we are working on solutions to alleviate three issues in particular: drought; sand and dust storms; and distressed migration.

Drought and food insecurity are being made worse by the unusually strong *El-Niño* in 2016. It is one of the strongest in recorded history. Following the important discussions about drought at the 12th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD, the secretariat is ramping up its work in this area. We aim to ensure that drought management planning and early warning is an integral part of the LDN policy cycle so that Parties can take a proactive approach.

The UNCCD will also be supporting an important Africa drought policy conference hosted by the Government of Namibia and taking place in Windhoek on 15–19 August 2016. At this conference, we will launch a special edition on drought and dryland management policy with Finland's Viikki Tropical Resources Institute (VITRI). Back-to-back with the conference, a wrap-up of the first phase of capacity building work for National Drought Management Policies and an inception session for the next phase will be conducted.

The UNCCD will continue to work with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the CBD on providing concrete support at national level. We will be focusing on the establishment of early warning systems that can identify vulnerable population groups at risk of drought, where the use of sustainable land management approaches might build resilience.

Finally, the UNCCD is working on a pilot research project with the German Development Institute (DIE) on drought and food insecurity in Ethiopia and Kenya. It is designed to help determine practical policy options to improve drought resilience. The findings and outcomes of this work will be put forward for consideration and decision at the Thirteenth UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP13) in 2017.



Sand and dust storms have always existed. But as degradation occurs, the problem gets worse and new source areas emerge. When degraded land has lost its vegetation cover and much of its soil moisture, wind can carry topsoil across oceans and continents. The land where these sand and dust clouds originate, thus loses more and more of its fertile soil cover. In the receiving areas, dust storms may pollute the atmosphere — also by further dispersing harmful industrial pollutants —, clog machinery and harm our health. Millions can be affected each year.

The UNCCD is working with WMO and UNEP on a „Global Assessment of Sand and dust storms“ to be published in May 2016 at the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2). The assessment will identify current and emerging sand and dust hotspots and the populations affected.

The UNCCD will then work with partners to analyse the assessment and recommend policy measures to strengthen natural barriers to the spread of sand and dust storms caused by desertification, to promote SLM practices and incentives among the farming populations in affected areas; and to educate at-risk populations on how to cope with the effects of sand and dust storms. The policy will be put forward for consideration at the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (13) in 2017.

Land degradation is an environmental push factor for distressed migration.

As desperate populations are being forced to migrate, their abandonment of the land can further increase the social and economic isolation of the most vulnerable community members that have had to stay behind. As a basic rule of thumb, in a situation of inappropriate land use practice and falling productivity compounded by climate change, farmers and other land users initially move to the next available piece of productive land, often forest. 80% of deforestation pressures worldwide are the result of agricultural expansion. Once this land is exhausted, migration pressures gather pace.

Emerging migration patterns are increasingly rooted in the depletion of natural resources as well as in aspirations for a better economic future. Severe, slow-onset events — those that gradually impact livelihoods and ecosystems — tend to lead to permanent moves. While many people will move within their own region or to nearby cities driving unplanned urbanization, up to 135 million people are at risk of distressed migration as a result of land degradation in the next 30 years. Any response must provide meaningful and sustained work for those vulnerable to distressed migration and radicalization; it must take account of climatic change and at-risk food production



systems. By offering greater stability and opportunity in home countries and regions, it should be possible to reduce the migration pathways and build economic development for the future.

In 2016–2017, the UNCCD will be working with key partners to provide even clearer evidence of the connection between land degradation, drought and migration to support policy discussions. We will develop guidance on land-based opportunities and develop a detailed map of vulnerability and joint hot-spots for out-

migration and land degradation, in vulnerable dryland regions.

The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative: a ribbon of hope from Dakar to Djibouti

The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel initiative is a metaphor for a mosaic of well-managed and restored land taking shape from Dakar to Djibouti. As an active partner of this African Union-led initiative, the Global Mechanism is implementing FLEUVE — a European Commission-funded project that aims to build capacity at the local level, in order to increase investments into sustainable land management and create ‘green jobs’, especially for women and young people.

To boost the visibility of the Great Green Wall, the Global Mechanism, together with the African Union Commission is leading a public awareness campaign, which aims to ultimately influence investment into land restoration. The campaign was launched at COP21 in Paris, through a Virtual Reality experience, coinciding with the USD 4 billion commitment from development partners for the Great Green Wall over the next 5 years.



Exploring the potential of land-based job opportunities is also an objective of the Italian Government funded Project: “West Africa: Promoting sustainable land management in migration prone areas through innovative financing mechanisms”, implemented by the Global Mechanism with the technical support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).



If we want to make land degradation neutrality a reality, knowledge is a basic building block. To achieve LDN, the right information should be accessible to all. It must be in the hands of the right people – those who need it most. That means policy makers and smallholder farmers. It means especially women.

Successful knowledge transfer and capacity building is more crucial than ever. The UNCCD is utilizing a number of flagship mechanisms and tools to make this happen.

The UNCCD **Capacity Building Marketplace** continues to go from strength to strength with more people sharing their knowledge products and needs with us. Please help us grow this!

The COP established a **Science-Policy Interface (SPI)** to provide policymakers and other decision makers with state-of-the-art policy recommendations that are based on the most current and relevant science. This body of experts is providing vital input to the UNCCD and other processes. In this biennium, we expect to see major work on Land Degradation Neutrality and, in the run up to the UNFCCC COP 22 in Marrakesh, Morocco, on the role of land in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The **Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal (SKBP)** is the knowledge hub for LDN. It is designed to connect users to global knowledge and information on sustainable land management. It aims to empower national stakeholders and local communities working to address challenges relating to desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) on the ground with access to the world's best resources. The prototype was completed and presented at COP 12 in 2015. The development of a "full-size" version is well underway. It will provide a dedicated search engine, many options for interactivity and a focus on solutions/technologies, combined with a wealth of best practices. Five new knowledge partners will be connected this year that support implementing LDN targets. By the end of 2016, expect to see a mobile application, a change in branding and a launch of the full-fledged SKBP product.

Finally, in 2017 we will also be releasing the 1st edition of the **Global Land Outlook (GLO)** in both print and digital formats. The GLO is expected to be the new flagship publication of the UNCCD, akin to the CBD's Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO) and the UNEP's Global Environmental Outlook (GEO).

The GLO will be a strategic communications platform and publication that demonstrates the central importance of land quality to human well-being, assesses current trends in land conversion, degradation and loss, identifies the

driving factors and analyzes the impacts, provides scenarios for future challenges and opportunities, and presents a new and transformative vision for land management policy, planning and practice at global and national scales.

Bringing together a diverse group of international experts and partners, the GLO will address the future challenges for the management and restoration of land resources in the context of sustainable development, including:

- food, water and energy security;
- climate change and biodiversity conservation;
- urban, peri-urban and infrastructure development;
- land tenure, governance and gender; and
- migration, conflict and human security.

An integral part of the GLO's digital platform will be the direct linkage with, and support from, the UNCCD's Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal (SKBP) which allows users to perform advanced searches within the relevant knowledge bases of our partners.

Other unique features of the 1st edition of the GLO are the:

- Working Papers Series – a supplementary set of publications to provide contributors with an expanded format for disseminating their analyses;
- Scaling Up Best Practices – a new vision for replicating and expanding sustainable land management practices to achieve multiple development objectives; and
- Land Management Index – a mechanism by which to explore the utility of using existing indicators to advocate for better land management policy, planning and practice.



CONCLUSION

The world is facing some daunting challenges. Entire populations are being disempowered, disillusioned and uprooted as the land that they rely on for their survival and for their future no longer provides for them. An effective and realistic plan to close the carbon emissions gap or adapt to climate change; to provide enough food and water for all; to find meaningful opportunities for the billions yet to be born; or to stabilize vulnerable regions is just not realistic without healthy and productive, sustainably managed land resources.

As complicated as the world's problems are, investing in LDN and rehabilitating at least 12 million hectares of land each year can make a vital contribution. The tools in the LDN toolbox can efficiently stabilize communities, economies and their enabling ecological environment.

Momentum is with smart investments in the land: Throughout 2016–2017, the UNCCD and its partners will be demonstrating what good land stewardship can achieve. In this brochure we have been able to highlight only a small part of the exciting work that is now happening on sustainable land management through UNCCD. We hope that you will find the projects and initiatives outlined here stimulating and engaging. Please join us in achieving a land degradation neutrality – wherever you are. Life on land depends on it.



LINKS AND CONTACT

To find out more, please visit...

... www.unccd.int

... www.global-mechanism.org

... <http://global-land-outlook.squarespace.com/about/#outlook>

... http://www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Capacity-building/CBW/Pages/default.aspx?utm_source=unccd.int/marketplace&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=CBM#

Or contact: secretariat@unccd.int.



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