



Regional Inception Workshop Report

NATIONAL TARGET SETTING to ACHIEVE LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY

in Asia Pacific Region

Bangkok, Thailand, 12-13 July 2016



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1. Introduction

The Royal Government of Thailand hosted the Inception workshop for the Asia-Pacific Region¹ from 12-13 July in Bangkok. It marked the regional launching of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP), which is spearheaded by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Global Mechanism (GM).

The LDN-TSP aims at providing assistance to countries in establishing national voluntary targets for Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and identifying transformative projects to achieve these targets.

16 out of the 17 LDN TSP participating countries (see Annex 4) attended the workshop, with Iraq sending their regrets due to administrative difficulties. Each country was represented by its UNCCD National Focal Point (NFP). Six LDN-TSP Country Consultants/Experts and representatives of GEF, UNDP, IUCN and ADB were also present. Participants had the opportunity to discuss the LDN concept and its pivotal role for achieving SDGs. Discussions also centered around the general roadmap, particularly as how to implement the LDN TSP at the national level, and as to the practical implications for each of the participating countries.

This report summarizes the key issues discussed during the workshop as well as the main results and conclusions.

2. Workshop objectives

The terms of reference of the workshop and the detailed agenda are provided in Annex 3. The main objectives of the workshop were:

1. To become familiar with the approach to LDN target setting;
2. To identify opportunities for leverage through the LDN target setting process;
3. To create mutual understanding about the LDN target setting roadmap and mutual accountabilities.

During the two-day workshop, the participants were given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the methodological and operational approaches related to the target setting process and to exchange their views and propositions for the implementation of the LDN target setting process in their countries. Furthermore, the workshop offered a platform for regional exchanges and collaboration between the Asia-Pacific countries.

The workshop focused on the presentation and discussion of the LDN target setting process along with a stepwise approach (see below) developed by the UNCCD Secretariat/GM team and how to use this

¹ With the exception of countries from the region covered by the Inception Workshop in Georgia in June 2016 on the occasion of which Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation attended. To be noted that Armenia, Bhutan, Indonesia and Turkey had actively participated in the pilot phase preceding the LDN TSP.

process as a vehicle to achieve SDG target 15.3 in consistence with the UNCCD planning and reporting system. The proposed steps are as follows,

1. Ensure Government leadership and stakeholder engagement;
2. Setting LDN baselines;
3. Assessing land degradation trends;
4. Identifying drivers of land degradation;
5. Defining national voluntary LDN targets;
6. Mainstreaming LDN in the national land use planning and management system;
7. Identifying measures to achieve LDN targets;
8. Facilitating enabling actions towards LDN;
9. Monitoring progress towards LDN;
10. Reporting on LDN.

Three working groups (two English and one Arabic speaking) were formed and each discussed three topics: How to (1) ensure highest governmental commitment and leadership as well as engagement with key stakeholders, (2) create leverage opportunities through the LDN target setting process; and (3) get organized to put LDN TSP into action (summarized results are given in Annex 2).

3. Summary of main workshop results

- In the *introductory session* several countries expressed their intention to use their already existing national monitoring and reporting systems for the purpose of LDN. Some participants stressed the importance of understanding how the LDN target setting process shall be linked to other SDGs such as food security and climate change. Some countries emphasized to be informed at the end of this workshop as to how LDN and the NAP, whether or not aligned to the 10-year Strategy, will be linked and interrelated.
- *LDN target setting methodology*. The LDN TSP team presented the stepwise approach as described in a Technical Guide. That proposed methodology for carrying out the target setting aims at achieving LDN by 2030. The outcomes and outputs are outlined in Annex 1. The methodology was understood and well accepted by most participants, and technical discussions were intellectually stimulating and interactive. Participants showed a particular interest in the following topics: (i) indicators, (ii) baseline setting, and (iii) (remote sensing) data expected to be provided by the LDN TSP team to the countries. The technical debate also focused on: (i) the soil organic carbon indicator, above and below ground, and the need to develop a global network of soil observatories using the same standards, (ii) vegetative cover versus net primary productivity measurement, (iii) the fact that LDN will require a major change in the way land use planning and development planning at large is traditionally being handled, (iv) the implications of LDN in terms of social and economic development policies and its importance to achieve sustainability, and (v) considering the obvious linkages between LDN and EIA/strategic environmental assessments.
- *Mainstreaming into development plans*: Participants expressed that LDN shouldn't be mainstreamed only in land use planning but into development plans of the countries. One suggestion is mainstreaming into "sustainable land use planning". There were questions relating to lessons learned from the experience gained in the pilot countries. Other fundamental issues raised by participants concern the scale at which LDN is to be achieved, the feasibility and rationale of the *like for like* option proposed by the UNCCD's Science-Policy-Interface (SPI), and

whether or not LDN can allow offsetting land degradation by restoration or rehabilitation of degraded land in different types of landscapes or watersheds.

- The relationship between *NAPs* and LDN was raised several times and the question as to whether countries are supposed to start aligning/integrating LDN into their NAPs, as well as to realign LDN with NAP. It was clarified that countries who have already aligned their NAP are not requested to include yet LDN into their NAPs if they don't want to. However, countries in the process of aligning their NAP were encouraged to start taking into consideration LDN.
- Opportunities for *leverage*: Some participants highlighted the need for "proof" of benefits and economic arguments in favor of a LDN oriented approach, underpinned with numbers and hard facts particularly regarding the socio-economic benefits. This, in combination with communication tools/policy briefs etc., may help catch the attention of highest policy-makers and ultimately to convince them to mainstream LDN into national plans and policies. It is considered imperative to create a momentum within different ministries to mobilizing all sectors of society concerned beyond the sole traditional direct land users. It was highlighted that it would be critical to solicit the political support of UN Resident Coordinators to reach out to high political levels. UNDP, GEF and IUCN provided a very positive feedback on the LDN approach in general highlighting the importance of the LDN TS process at the national level and stressing the fact that achieving LDN leads to achieving many interrelated SDGs. Overall, the participants recognized the importance of bringing on board relevant stakeholders (not only Government, look for instance at land owners and private sector) which include not only the implementers but especially other partners including partners.
- *LDN awareness-raising*: The importance of using all means of communication and networking (social networks and mass media, CSOs, etc.) to attract attention and obtain leverage on LDN as a priority development opportunity was agreed among all participants. It was discussed that in some countries there may already be an abundance of working groups, followed by the question as to whether LDN should be better addressed in the frame of other working groups/committees (such as SDG Committee), or whether others should follow the LDN umbrella. A mutual commitment between countries and partners involved should take place in order to promote and explain LDN to different target groups at the country level as well as at international fora. It was suggested that LDN should also be taken up to regional bodies such as ASEAN and SAARC to increase the weight of LDN regionally.
- *Roadmap*: A country work plan template, with detailed outputs and outcomes and a timeline (see Annex 1), was presented to the participants and well received, especially because it summarized the steps forward and key follow-up activities for NFPs, Country Consultants and the Regional Consultant. Some participants pointed at potential delays with follow-up actions at country level, as some of the milestones appear not to be achievable by the end of the third quarter. Many participants, however, expressed their will and commitment to move forward. It was understood that it would be necessary to expedite the recruitment of Country Consultants for those countries which have not done so yet.
- *Communication* between UNCCD NFP and The Global Mechanism LDN TSP team: The Country Consultants were suggested to work very closely with their respective NFPs. The NFP represents the National Government for the LDN project whereas the Country Consultants are resource persons who have been assigned by the UNCCD and the GM to assist the NFP and the Government with the implementation of LDN. The LDN TSP Regional and Country Consultants

will be reporting to the Regional Team Leader. Regular and clear communication between the countries and the GM/LDN TSP team was emphasized.

- During the course of the workshop a strong team spirit was built among countries, creating a clear momentum for action, which needs to be capitalized through country-tailored follow-up actions from the LDN TSP team as well as periodic follow-up meetings. In relation to the LDN target setting methodological approach no questions were left unaddressed, and participants expressed their satisfaction at the end of the workshop.

4. Conclusions and follow-up actions

- Take action to achieve roadmap milestones and outputs and outcomes as identified in the country work plan and in Annex 1, respectively.
- To identify at country level the international initiatives taking place and to explore the possibilities of aligning / integrating those initiatives in the LDN process. This action should be complemented by identifying the national SDG working group or committee where LDN could be embedded. Integrating LDN in the 2030 development Agenda will boost the LDN process to a higher political level.
- Particular attention must be devoted to ensure that all economic sectors which have a direct or indirect impact on land cover and land use are strongly encouraged by national authorities to take an active role in the LDN working group throughout the LDN target setting process, so they are engaged towards achieving SDG 15.3.
- It is important to make sure that in all participating countries, the NFPs of the UNFCCC and CBD are fully associated to the LDN target setting process, in order to maximize the co-benefits of LDN in supporting the 3 Rio conventions, as well as other fundamental international commitments such as RAMSAR and relevant regional treaties concerning in particular shared (above and below ground) water resources, wetlands and forests.
- Information from the LDN TSP Management to the NFPs on fund flow mechanisms to cover LDN activities, especially but not limited to the National Inception Workshop, will be provided at the earliest convenience.
- Participants' comments, recommendations and observations regarding the methodological approach for the LDN target setting process will be taken into account for further conceptual developments and revisions.

Annex 1 LDN TSP outcomes and outputs



LDN TSP outputs and outcomes (DRAFT)

Transformative LDN projects/programmes and innovative financing mapped out	
LDN included in selected policies and commitments	
LDN target established	
Key policy/technical measures to achieve LDN identified	High level note of measures to avoid, minimize and reverse LD
LDN trends and drivers mapped, including possible "hot spots"	LDN SWOT analysis on legal and institutional environment established
LDN baseline established and mapped	
<p style="text-align: center;">Government leadership and stakeholder engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDN Leverage Plan established • Most senior government and major international partners mobilized • Multi stakeholder engagement established 	



LDN TSP timeline (DRAFT)

Transformative LDN projects/programmes and innovative financing mapped out		December 2017
LDN included in selected policies and commitments		
LDN target established		June 2017
Key policy/technical measures to achieve LDN identified	High level note of measures to avoid, minimize and reverse LD	
LDN trends and drivers mapped, including possible "hot spots"	LDN SWOT analysis on legal and institutional environment established	
LDN baseline established and mapped		February 2017
<p style="text-align: center;">Government leadership and stakeholder engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDN Leverage Plan established • Most senior government and major international partners mobilized • Multi stakeholder engagement established 		September 2016

Annex 2 Summary of the working group discussions

Following the presentations of Steps 1 to 5 of the Technical Guide for LDN target Setting, three working groups (two English and one Arabic speaking) were formed and each discussed two topics: (1) how to ensure highest governmental commitment and leadership as well as engagement with key stakeholders, and (2) how to create leverage opportunities through the LDN target setting process. On the second day Steps 6-10 were covered, and subsequently again three working groups worked on (iii) how to get organized to put LDN TSP into action. The working groups developed a variety of ideas the results of which are summarized below:

Government leadership and stakeholder engagement

Guiding question - How to ensure highest governmental commitment and leadership as well as engagement with key stakeholders?

Raise LDN Awareness	Information campaigns at country level are considered critical to raise LDN awareness among the broader and technical public. A particular emphasis shall be given to highest Government level (including coordinating Ministries of Finance and Planning), the private sector, CSOs and the local level Government, not to forget local actors such as land-owners and land users and land managers, etc. Awareness raising could be done through mass media and other means of communication such as social media, to be further defined. Messages and explanations with regard to the LDN concept and benefits need to be simple and straightforward, particularly for business executives and policy-makers. An issue of particular interest is the economics of LDN/societal benefits, i.e. the economic cost of land degradation and the economic benefits through avoidance and/or reversal of land degradation.
Harmonize LDN goals with SDGs / three Rio Conventions	LDN should become part of the “SDG momentum” and of the “nationalization of SDGs” process. Linkages between LDN and the mandates of the other two Rio conventions should be (made) clear, and synergies and options for co-operation with UNFCCC and CBD shall be identified.
Engage the Private Sector	Encourage the private sector to enhance LDN investments and create an enabling policy and investment environment for PPPs where and when deemed relevant. There may be a need to develop capacity-building activities for public sector staff involved in LDN, aimed at “successfully building partnerships and engaging with the private sector”.
Coordination at country level	NFPs play a pivotal role in bringing all relevant stakeholders together to ensure that the respective national LDN Working Group/National LDN Steering Committee will become fully functional and ideally become part of the national SDG Working Group. Help ensure the continued participation and ownership of high-level Government and development partners in the LDN target setting process. Raise LDN to Cabinet level to be able to integrate LDN into national development policies and plans. Promote LDN “friendly” land use planning and conflict management mechanisms.

Leverage Opportunities

Guiding question: How to create game changing leverage opportunities through the LDN target setting process?

Link and mainstream LDN to/into SDG implementation and other relevant programs	LDN shouldn't be pursued in isolation but rather linked to all relevant SDG goals and other priorities of individual countries and with the two other Rio conventions. Hying on the synergies especially with the relevant SDGs and programs of the two other conventions would be useful to promote LDN.
Regional and sub-regional political bodies	LDN should be promoted not only at the highest level in a given country but also at the level of regional bodies such as ASEAN, ACP, SAARC to create leverage opportunities at sub-regional and regional co-operation level.
LDN resource mobilization and investment frameworks	Alternative ways were proposed to create innovative financing mechanisms such as LDN seal, tax swaps, LDN Fund, etc. LDN countries shall identify LDN investment opportunities arising for the business/private sector and provide incentives to create a business climate conducive to LDN investments and to an entrepreneurial approach. LDN as a tool to tap into global, regional and private financing mechanisms.
Create a reliable long-term policy perspective	LDN is expected to be embedded in long-term development planning and the policy and legal framework. This shall facilitate the mobilization of resources for more investments in sustainable and climate-smart agriculture.

Roadmap

Guiding question: How to get organized to put LDN –TSP into action?

Stakeholder analysis and stakeholder consultations	Define, identify and engage all relevant stakeholders. The consultation process shall involve the relevant stakeholders such as Government, private sector/business, civil society, women groups, farmers and other land users, youth, owners, NFPs of all three Conventions, etc. It will be critical to identify stakeholders' respective roles and responsibilities.
National LDN Working Group Committee	Form the National Working Group Committee comprising of representatives of relevant stakeholder groups. After formation of the Committee, a schedule of meeting should be decided to work on the next steps of the LDN TSP and generate the desired output.
National Inception Workshop	The National Inception Workshop shall be used for raising awareness on the LDN approach. Decision-makers should be invited to this workshop.
Data collection and baseline setting	Updating maps, initiating data collection and setting baselines for LDN; analyze data gaps, etc.; possibly organize a capacity-building workshop on national data validation; identifying causes of land degradation; review relevant policies and the legal and regulatory framework.

Annex 3 Workshop Terms of Reference and agenda

TERMS OF REFERENCE for the INCEPTION WORKSHOP on NATIONAL TARGET SETTING TO ACHIEVE LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY IN THE ASIA- PACIFIC REGION

Bangkok, Thailand, 12-13 July 2016

Following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the endorsement of SDG target 15.3 as guiding principle for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD supports countries preparedness to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) by 2030.

Land degradation is a global phenomenon, which is leading to the reduction and loss of the biological and economic productive capacity of land. It is caused by human activities, exacerbated by natural processes and magnified by climate change and biodiversity loss. Some 25% of the global land surface is considered to be degraded; every year, 12 million hectares are added to the total area of degraded land. The economic costs of land degradation are estimated at USD 490 billion per year, corresponding to three to six per cent of the global agriculture gross domestic product.

Recognizing that desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) are major global environmental and developmental concerns, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was established in 1994 and is ratified by 196 member-states of the United Nations and one regional economic integration organization (the European Union). The main mission of the Convention, as indicated by the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008-18) is “to provide a global framework to support the development and implementation of national and regional policies, programs and measures to prevent, control and reverse desertification/land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought through scientific and technological excellence, raising public awareness, standard setting, advocacy and resource mobilization, thereby contributing to poverty reduction”.

In September 2015, the global community agreed on “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 targets. Goal 15 urges countries to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and 14 halt biodiversity loss. Target 15.3 aims to “combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world” by 2030. The proposed indicator to measure the achievement of SDG target 15.3 is “Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area”. The proposed sub-indicators for SDG target 15.3 are land cover, land

productivity, soil organic carbon stocks. They correspond to the progress indicators adopted by the UNCCD.

According to the Decisions 2 & 3/COP12 taken in October 2015 by the 12th session of the Conference of Parties (COP) of the UNCCD, held in Ankara, Turkey:

- striving to achieve SDG target 15.3 is a strong vehicle for driving implementation of the UNCCD;
- LDN is defined as “a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remain stable or increase within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems”;
- Countries are invited to “formulate [national] voluntary targets to achieve LDN”; and
- UNCCD bodies are requested i) to provide “guidance for formulating national LDN targets and initiatives”; and ii) to facilitate “the use of UNCCD indicator framework as a contribution to the monitoring, evaluation and communication of progress towards the national LDN targets”.

In response to above Decisions, the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD has established a Global Programme in support of National Voluntary Target Setting for LDN. The main objective of the “LDN Target Support Programme” (LDN-TSP) is to enable country Parties to define national baselines and to identify targets and measures to achieve LDN.

The main objectives of the inception workshop are:

1. to become familiar with the approach to LDN TSP;
2. to identify opportunities for leverage through the LDN-TSP;
3. to create mutual understanding about the LDN target setting roadmap and mutual accountabilities.

LDN TSP INCEPTION WORKSHOP, Bangkok, 12-13 July 2016

Tuesday, 12 July 2016

Time	Session
08.00	Registration
09.00	Workshop opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Royal Thai Government • UNCCD/Global Mechanism • Group photo
09.30	Coffee break
10.00	Workshop agenda, objectives and introduction to LDN <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction round of workshop participants, incl. statements on expectations • Workshop objectives and agenda • Introduction to LDN: why , what for and how • Q & A LDN Target Setting: presentation of Technical Guide for country engagement => Step 1: Government leadership and stakeholder engagement
12.30	Lunch break
13.30	LDN Target Setting: presentation of Technical Guide for country engagement (cont.) => Step 2: Setting the LDN baseline => Step 3: Identifying land degradation trends => Step 4: Identifying drivers of land degradation => Step 5: Defining national voluntary LDN targets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q & A
15.15	Coffee break
15.45	Working groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives of the working group session & expected outputs Guiding questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to ensure highest governmental commitment and leadership as well as engagement with key stakeholders? • How to create game changing leverage opportunities through the LDN target setting process?
17.15-17:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of working group outcomes including Q&A • Wrap up

18:00 - Reception hosted by Government of Thailand at ESCAP

Wednesday, 13 July 2016

Time	Session
08.30	Summary of day 1 and outlook for day 2
08.45-12:30 (including coffee break)	<p>LDN Target Setting: presentation of Technical Guide for country engagement (cont.)</p> <p>=> Step 6: Mainstreaming LDN in land use planning => Step 7: Identifying measures to achieve LDN targets => Step 8: Facilitating action towards LDN => Step 9: Monitoring progress towards LDN => Step 10: Reporting on LDN</p> <p>Q&A</p> <p>Working groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives of the working group session & expected outputs <p>Guiding question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to get organized to put LDN –TSP into action?
12.30	Lunch break
13:45-17:30 (including coffee break)	<p>Working groups (Continued)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of working group outcomes including Q&A <p>The way forward – creating the LDN target setting road map</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The generic roadmap of the LDN target setting process (milestones, timeframe, etc.) • Leverage plan and country programme documents • Discussion, agreements, commitments, requirements, Q&A • <p>Workshop closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final comments from participants • Closing remarks

Annex 4 Participating countries and organizations

Bangladesh
Cambodia
Iran
Jordan
Kuwait
Lebanon
Nepal
Niue
People's Republic of China
Philippines
Republic of Korea
Samoa
Sri Lanka
Syria
Thailand
Timor Leste
Vietnam

Asian Development Bank
GEF
IUCN
UNCCD/GM
UNDP