THE GLOBAL MECHANISM
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

LDN
Land Degradation Neutrality
Target Setting Programme

Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting
Initial Findings and Lessons Learned

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LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY TARGET SETTING:
INITIAL FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

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Foreword

Ibrahim Thiaw
UNCCD Executive Secretary

Healthy land is key to achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, from reducing climate change, biodiversity loss and poverty, to increasing equality, decent work and food security for nearly eight billion people. That's why, with the productivity of a quarter of our land already diminished, over 120 countries have committed to set voluntary national Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets, and joined the LDN Target Setting Programme to avoid, reduce and reverse such degradation. This policy brief shares the findings and recommendations from the technical data and policy reviews of the Programme to further strengthen those efforts.

In 2015, governments identified their priorities and objectives to achieve LDN, and then backed them with strong political statements. Reflecting that demand for urgent action, within a year, the Global Mechanism and the secretariat of the UNCCD and its international partners had established the LDN Target Setting Programme, which takes countries through a structured process to help leverage, assess, measure and achieve their commitments to LDN. Already, countries' efforts to identify shared visions, achievable solutions, priority hot-spots and monitoring baselines have shaped a new data-driven approach to tackling land degradation.

This brief can help convert countries' commitments into concrete actions. For example, many national stakeholders say that the target setting process was the first time they had systematically analyzed the causes and effects of land degradation to make evidence-based decisions on what is desirable and feasible to achieve by 2030. As they also indicate concern about human activities, particularly regarding deforestation, population pressure and agricultural practices, the findings of this brief can help countries to prioritize those decisions to multiply the benefits across other areas of sustainable development.

However, the brief also identifies some areas where more effort is required to connect the opportunities available for such mutually-beneficial decision making. For example, land-based solutions could contribute around one third of the emission reductions needed to achieve the Paris Agreement on Climate Change by 2030 through Nationally Determined Contributions, yet few countries connected these ambitions when setting their targets. And, while many countries expressed concern about the need to expand food production, not enough countries used or had access to national data to estimate land productivity and soil organic carbon stocks. Nevertheless, now is the time to take stock of what has emerged from the LDN target setting process and to work towards creating stronger synergies and improving data and monitoring; every country has the opportunity to do so.

Although the LDN target setting process is still relatively new, the achievements facilitated by the LDN Target Setting Programme have already been recognized internationally, most recently by IUCN which, through its Global Impact Award, praised the Programme for its innovative, scientific and participatory approach to halting land degradation. However, I know that everyone involved will consider it an even greater achievement to see even more countries committing to set LDN targets and taking bold action to meet their commitments to the 2030 Agenda.

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Key Messages

The following key messages and recommendations are based on the analysis of the LDN target setting country reports and associated documents.

- **Political leadership:** Continued government leadership that can strategically guide all relevant sectors should remain at the core for LDN implementation. This includes fully exploiting the identified leverage entry points for LDN, such as land use plans, national and local budgets, and targeted public and private investments.

- **National coordination:** The established institutional and technical environments for implementing the LDN target setting process in each country, for example, the LDN working groups, are key resources to continue working towards the achievement of LDN. The involvement and support of international partners, such as the UNCCD, are strongly recommended, and inclusiveness and gender parity of working groups will need to be further improved for effective LDN engagement.

- **Enabling environment:** Countries should include LDN and related elements in upcoming legal amendments and drafting of new bills, and strengthen capacity for the development, monitoring and enforcement of legal provisions surrounding LDN. Countries should improve coordination between institutions involved in LDN and ensure availability and implementation of land use plans that integrate the LDN principles.

- **LDN monitoring:** Countries should further strengthen national and regional information systems and increase technical capacity for the main entities responsible for LDN implementation, as well as partners responsible for monitoring and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, to effectively monitor land degradation. A set of verifiable indicators at local and national levels for each LDN target should be defined to enable countries to monitor and evaluate progress and results achieved.

- **Knowledge sharing:** Country-to-country information exchange mechanisms should be strengthened to (a) share experiences and raise awareness of advanced technologies and techniques and (b) develop common strategies and policies. Sharing good examples of achieving LDN and transformative projects and programmes (TPPs) among countries, the GM/UNCCD and other partners is encouraged.

- **Financing:** To achieve LDN, substantial investment programmes are needed. These can include new and innovative financing options to scale up LDN, such as different types of public-private blended financing.

- **Approach to transformative LDN projects:** The checklist for LDN TPPs has the potential to have substantive influence on the design of TPPs as well as on the implementation of LDN. The checklist can also be used by donors to inform their funding decisions. Moreover, it is important to mainstream gender dimensions within national LDN implementation efforts and to explore stronger integration of livelihoods and other co-benefits within the LDN targets and associated measures.

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1. Introduction

Fighting land degradation is important in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and efforts to establish **Land Degradation Neutrality** (LDN) as a global objective culminated in 2015, when LDN became part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 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 halt biodiversity loss*". More specifically, **SDG 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.

Following the establishment of this global target, the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD decided to integrate LDN into the Convention process and reached an agreement on the LDN concept (decision 16/COP12). COP12 defined LDN 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". Recognition of LDN at the political stage created the need to operationalize LDN and transform it into an implementable approach that enables countries to make progress towards achieving SDG target 15.3 and the objectives of the UNCCD.[1] The Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality was developed by the Science-Policy Interface of the UNCCD to provide a scientific approach to planning, implementing and monitoring LDN.[2] The LDN response hierarchy, defined as Avoid > Reduce > Reverse land degradation, encourages a broad adoption of measures to avoid and reduce land degradation, combined with localized action to reverse degradation to achieve LDN across each land type.

In October 2015, country Parties were invited to "Formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN in accordance with their specific national circumstances and development priorities, taking into account the list of options for operationalizing LDN at the national level".[3] The secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD, with the support of 18 international partners,[4] established the **LDN Target Setting Programme**[5] to assist countries in formulating voluntary targets to achieve LDN by providing practical tools and guidance. Since its inception, more than 120 countries have participated in the Programme.

The LDN Target Setting Programme supports interested countries through a voluntary LDN target setting process that encourages countries to identify land degradation drivers and trends, define a land degradation baseline and establish LDN targets and associated measures to achieve LDN.

The LDN Target Setting Programme consists of four building blocks:

[1] Minelli, S., Erlewein, A., Castillo, V. (2017) Land Degradation Neutrality and the UNCCD: From Political Vision to Measurable Targets. In: Ginzky, H., Heuser, I., Qin, T., Ruppel, O., Wegerdt, P. (eds) International Yearbook of Soil Law and Policy 2016. International Yearbook of Soil Law and Policy, vol 2016. Springer, Cham.
[2] Orr, B.J., A.L. Cowie, V.M. Castillo Sanchez, P. Chasek, N.D. Crossman, A. Erlewein, G. Louwagie, M. Maron, G.I. Metternicht, S. Minelli, A.E. Tengberg, S. Walter, and S. Welton. 2017. Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality. A Report of the Science-Policy Interface. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Bonn, Germany. An online version of the report is available at https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/2017-08/LDN_CF_report_web-english.pdf
[3] ICCD/COP(12)/20/Add.1: Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twelfth session, held in Ankara, Turkey, from 12 to 23 October 2015. Part two: action taken.
[4] France, Germany, Luxembourg, Republic of Korea, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Venezuela, the European Space Agency, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Global Environment Facility, International Soil Reference and Information Centre – World Soil Information, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Soil Leadership Academy, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme and World Resources Institute.
[5] https://www.unccd.int/actions/ldn-target-setting-programme

BUILDING BLOCK 1

Leveraging LDN brings LDN to the forefront of national agendas and establishes the required institutional and technical environments and stakeholder engagement. The main output is the National LDN Target Setting Leverage Plan, which identifies country-level opportunities and synergies with LDN-related national, regional and global processes.

BUILDING BLOCK 2

Assessing LDN establishes the baseline scenario for LDN in line with the SDG process, including land degradation drivers and trends. The baseline assesses the current status and condition of land-based natural capital and ecosystem services. In September 2017, decisions 2 and 3 of COP13 invited country Parties to develop land degradation baselines and identify quantifiable and time-bound voluntary targets linked to national SDG agendas.[6] The LDN monitoring and reporting system, anchored in decision 22 of COP11,[7] identifies three sub-indicators of land degradation:

a. trends in land cover;
b. trends in land productivity, and
c. trends in carbon stock above and below ground.

The documents "Good Practice Guidance SDG Indicator 15.3.1"[8] and "LDN Methodological Note"[9] describe the LDN methodology for assessing land degradation and were further updated with the guidance document for 2018 UNCCD reporting.[10]

BUILDING BLOCK 3

Setting LDN targets and measures defines countries' ambitions to combat land degradation. Setting LDN targets and associated measures is the cornerstone of the LDN target setting process. It involves extensive stakeholder consultations to reach agreement on measurable, verifiable and time-bound targets to address the main land degradation drivers and trends.

BUILDING BLOCK 4

Achieving LDN identifies opportunities for transformative projects and programmes (TPPs) for LDN and promotes the integration of LDN into national development plans. The deliverables involve the mainstreaming of LDN in selected national policies and commitments, and the identification of financing opportunities in support of LDN TPP implementation.

This **Policy brief** is one of the deliverables of the LDN Target Setting Programme. It is based on two separate technical data and policy reviews of the LDN target setting country reports and associated documents conducted by the Global Mechanism in December 2018. It summarizes the results from these reviews and is intended to provide policy-relevant information for UNCCD country Parties, key decision- and policy-makers, national and international development partners, the UNCCD and other international organizations for further guidance, awareness -raising and advocacy on LDN.

[6] ICCD/COP(13)/21/Add.1: Report of the Conference of the Parties on its thirteenth session, held in Ordos, China, from 6 to 16 September 2017. Part two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth session.
[7] ICCD/COP(11)/23/Add.1: Report of the Conference of the Parties on its eleventh session, held in Windhoek, Namibia, from 16 to 27 September 2013. Part two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh session.
[8] https://knowledge.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/Metadata-15-03-01_20180123_1.pdf
[9] https://knowledge.unccd.int/publication/ldn-methodological-note
[10] https://prais.unccd.int/sites/default/files/helper_documents/3-DD_Guidance_EN_1.pdf

2. Main Findings

This section presents an analysis based on the information and data provided by the LDN Target Setting Programme participating countries through their LDN target setting country reports. The technical review covered 66 LDN country reports[11] and associated documents, 50 of which were endorsed by the focal point institutions and 16 requiring final confirmations. The methodology included the following steps:

- reviewing, interpreting and synthesizing available information following the structure of the LDN Target Setting Programme building blocks;
- analysing relationships between baselines and LDN targets;
- describing lessons learned and challenges;
- describing capacity development gaps and needs; and
- drawing conclusions and recommendations.

BUILDING BLOCK 1: LEVERAGING LDN

National LDN target setting leverage opportunities

Most countries linked the LDN target setting process to the SDGs and other national priorities outlined in their long-term national country visions, national development and/or poverty reduction strategies and medium-term plans and frameworks. All participating countries have signed and refer to multilateral environmental agreements, including the UNCCD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and their concomitant national plans and strategies for LDN leverage. However, only a few countries mentioned the recent Nationally Determined Contributions under UNFCCC and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030).

Countries did link LDN to specific initiatives and awareness programmes at various levels, including international (e.g., the Bonn Challenge[12]), regional (e.g., African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR 100[13]) and Initiative 20x20[14]), national (e.g., REDD+[15]) and sub-national (e.g., "Haritha (Green) Lanka" in Sri Lanka) levels. Development partner frameworks, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, supported several country initiatives and are referred to as appropriate leverage opportunities for LDN.

Countries dedicated much attention to the leverage opportunities within specific sectoral strategies and policies, especially agriculture, environment, forestry, climate change and, in some cases, mining, energy, infrastructure and transport. Land use plans at different scales and mainstreaming LDN into national, sectoral and local budgets and resource allocations are considered important leverage opportunities for LDN, although they are not mentioned by many countries.

[11] National LDN target setting country reports are publicly available at https://knowledge.unccd.int/home/country-information/countries-with-voluntary-ldn-targets
[12] http://www.bonnchallenge.org/content/challenge
[13] https://afr100.org/
[14] https://initiative20x20.org/
[15] REDD+: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries: https://redd.unfccc.int/

LDN stakeholder engagement

All countries have set up working groups to oversee the LDN target setting process. In some countries, already existing working groups or oversight committees, usually related to the UNCCD or the Rio Conventions, were used as a basis to guide the LDN process. Members of the working groups were mainly from the public sector, particularly from ministries or agencies involved in the environment, natural resources, forestry, as well as ministries of agriculture, infrastructure, transport, mining, water, energy, central planning or finance. Some members were from ministerial advisory groups or councils, and statistics offices. Non-public sector stakeholders in some working groups included members of civil society organizations (usually environmental) and the donor community. Only a few countries included indigenous organizations (e.g., in Guyana) and private sector representatives. In general, between 20 and 30 members participated in the working groups, with scope to further enhance the participation of women and increase the diversity and representation of non-governmental stakeholders.

Raising awareness is an important element in the broader agenda of the LDN target setting process. Although the media did not usually feature actively in the LDN working groups, promotion of LDN was realized in some countries through special shows about LDN on national TV stations, or in articles in newspapers or scientific journals.

BUILDING BLOCK 2: ASSESSING LDN

The LDN baseline and trends analysis

Most countries established their LDN baseline and completed the trends analysis. The relatively smooth implementation of the technical activities was firstly a success of the countries' commitments and secondly an achievement of the LDN Target Setting Programme. The design and scheduling of activities prepared by the Target Setting Programme team enabled countries to effectively implement the process and deliver the results as planned. Well-selected technical inputs – i.e., methodologies, default data and continued assistance – were key resources. In cooperation with international partners, an important input to the participating countries was the provision of software tools, such as Collect Earth,[16] Trends.Earth[17] and SoilGrids,[18] to access, process, analyse and publish earth observation data.

Special support was provided to Small Island Developing States by availing high-resolution satellite imagery to improve estimates of the LDN sub-indicators. This included capacity building in the use of LDN GIS-related tools, namely the Collect Earth and Trends.Earth applications, to assist with analyses of land degradation trends in their countries.

Several countries acknowledged the key role of the LDN Target Setting Programme in providing guidance and technical assistance, and requested additional support to continue monitoring land degradation, notably for further training and financial support to strengthen and refine the LDN assessments, upgrade knowledge in geospatial data management and strengthen national capacity in LDN-related subjects.

LDN national working groups put considerable effort into collating available LDN data from national sources to define the baseline (i.e., spatial and non-spatial information on topography, forest/vegetation cover, hydrology, soils, land use, slopes, population, agricultural production, etc.). However, national data on the three LDN sub-indicators was not always available and several countries used the default data to establish the LDN baseline and prepare national estimates. About one third of the 66 analysed countries that finalized their reports used national data to estimate land cover changes but very few used national data to estimate land productivity and soil organic carbon stocks.

Land degradation drivers

Deforestation, human population pressure and poor agricultural practices are the three most frequently identified causes of land degradation. From the data analysis, it appears that countries are by far more concerned with the impact of human activities than natural hazards. Among the natural land degradation drivers, drought was a major concern, especially in arid and semi-arid countries, as it strongly contributed to the depletion of the natural resources and threatened local economies due to its impact on agriculture.

The regional aggregation of land cover changes revealed that in some countries forest land is seriously threatened because of extensive deforestation and encroachment from other land use types, and that the decrease of grassland was often linked to the increase in cropland. Rapid population growth and the need to ensure food security for all citizens are the primary causes of the expansion of cropland, mainly at the expense of forests.

The conversion of forest to other land cover types was the most alarming problem because of the consequent reduction of soil organic carbon stock, acceleration of soil erosion and loss of biomass and biodiversity. Concern was also expressed for the decline in agricultural productivity due to unsustainable techniques and practices. Locally, soil/water pollution, forest and bush fires, mining activities, and poor management of wetlands and water bodies were important factors depleting natural resource capital.

[16] http://www.openforis.org/tools/collect-earth.html
[17] http://trends.earth/docs/en/
[18] https://soilgrids.org/#!/?layer=ORCDRC_M_sl2_250m&vector=1

The LDN legal and institutional environment

Environmental protection is enshrined in the constitution of several countries, with some countries treating it as a "right to a clean environment". A variety of environmental management and/or protection and related acts exist, including on biodiversity, forestry, wildlife, reserves/parks, pollution, waste and water, as well as various types of land acts and regulations, including land use planning. Laws and regulations governing agriculture, mining, infrastructure, energy and other sectors were also relevant and described by countries, as well as some very specific local acts that related to, for example, the protection of certain tree species, types of land, and domains. Table 1 provides a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the various legal and institutional frameworks around LDN among countries participating in the LDN Target Setting Programme.

BUILDING BLOCK 3: SETTING LDN TARGETS AND MEASURES

Identification of the LDN targets

LDN targets define countries' ambitions to address land degradation. They are the result of consultative processes involving stakeholder meetings, policy reviews, data analysis and capacity building. For the first time, the LDN target setting process allowed national stakeholders to systematically analyse causes and effects of land degradation to make evidence-based decisions on what is desirable and feasible to achieve by 2030 in order to avoid, reduce, or reverse land degradation.

The aggregated data analysis demonstrated that land degradation is primarily linked to the loss or depletion of forestland and to inadequate agricultural practices. Consequently, many countries aim to halt deforestation, restore forest land and improve the productivity and health of degraded forests (see Figure 1).

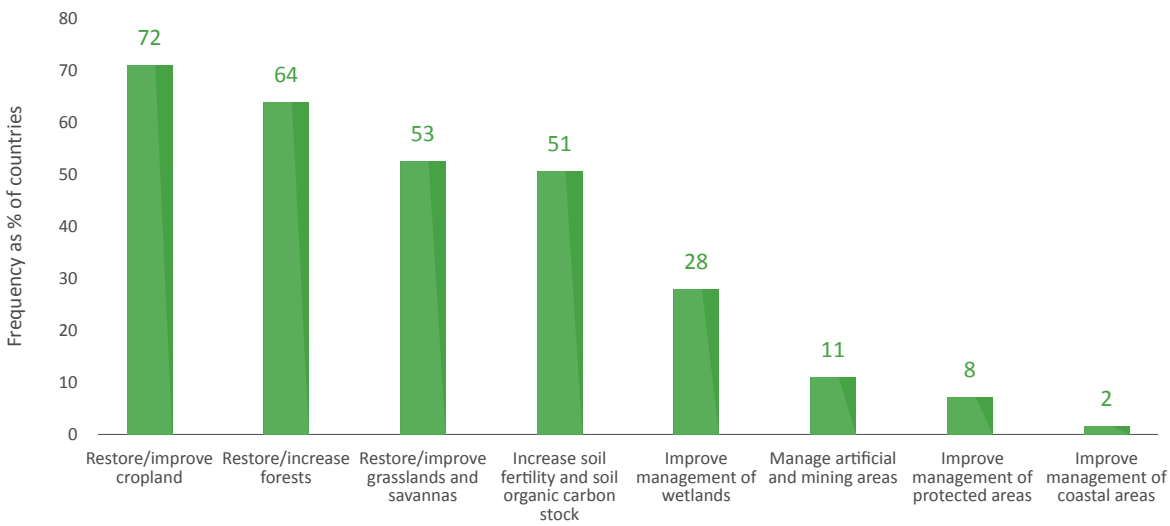
Most countries facing the expansion of agriculture, typically at the expense of forest, aim to improve agricultural practices, thereby increasing cropland productivity without decreasing soil organic carbon stocks. Such targets are often linked to national policies promoting food security and creating the conditions for environmentally sustainable agriculture.

In arid or semi-arid countries, mainly but not exclusively in Africa, the degradation of grasslands and savannas is a serious concern to be counteracted by the restoration of the ecosystems and wildlife conservation.

Other LDN targets aim to control urban area expansion, end illegal mining, rehabilitate/regulate artificial areas and/or implement sustainable management of wetlands and protected areas. These targets address problems such as human population growth, poor management of wetlands and other natural resources, water and soil pollution, oil extraction and mining, and weak enforcement of laws and regulations.

Defining LDN targets is a key objective, and implementing associated LDN measures is the means through which countries address land degradation issues. LDN stakeholders' commitments and efforts to pursue this objective demonstrate the relevance of strengthening and refining the process to increase its efficiency and guarantee reliable estimates of the expected impact of each target on ecosystems and economies.

Figure 1: Frequency of LDN targets cited by countries aggregated by main categories



Source: LDN target setting country reports

Table 1: Summary of key elements arising from the SWOT analysis of LDN legal and institutional frameworks at national level

STRENGTHS

Legal environment

- An extensive legal framework with laws and regulations covering the safeguarding of natural resources, environment, land use and physical planning is in place;
- Regulatory framework in place, including (Strategic) Environmental Impact Assessments; and
- In many countries land and/or natural resources related acts and underlying regulations have been reviewed, amended or promulgated in recent years and are up-to-date.

Institutional environment

- A normative institutional framework surrounding natural resources and land management is in place;
- Ministries of environment have the policy mandate, with agencies under this ministry in charge of implementation, monitoring and enforcement on environment-related matters;
- Functioning land management-related agencies and committees;
- Decentralization is conducive to effective local land management; and
- Some countries have set up watershed catchment or river basin councils.

WEAKNESSES

Legal environment

- Some relevant laws and regulations are out of date, notably planning and conservation acts;
- Some national or local laws seem not in line with international agreements and/or conventions;
- Laws are at times contradictory, have limited scope or miss the exact level of detail for clear interpretation;
- Laws and regulations are not always effectively implemented and/or enforced; and
- Capacity challenges exist in law development and implementation.

Institutional environment

- Responsibilities of institutions concerning environmental management in some countries not yet formally defined and proclaimed;
- Weak coordination, including overlapping and sometimes conflicting responsibilities and tasks among institutions / sectors;
- Inadequate financing of institutions and coordination mechanisms;
- Non-availability of agreed and validated land use plans;
- Lack of qualified staff, expertise, funds and equipment; and
- Weak information sharing and a lack of consistent and targeted communication.

OPPORTUNITIES

Legal environment

- Opportunities to integrate environmental or specific LDN concerns in upcoming amendments to (out-dated) acts or in new bills; and
- On-going harmonization of existing laws and regulations on land in several countries where the LDN concept should fit in.

Institutional environment

- Increasing awareness of sustainable development;
- Existence of overarching national strategies incorporating elements of sustainable or green development; and
- The availability of functioning and capacitated institutions and coordination mechanisms surrounding natural resources management, in particular land.

THREATS

Legal environment

- Poor land governance;
- Lack of coordinated regulatory implementation and enforcement;
- Inadequate land use planning, control and monitoring; and
- Absence of cost-benefit analysis of the impacts of land degradation to inform the legal framework.

Institutional environment

- Development pressure, whereby natural resources and environmental concerns may be overruled by economic development objectives;
- Adverse trend in global and national financing for sustainability; and
- Climate change and negative impacts of extreme weather events.

LDN hot-spots

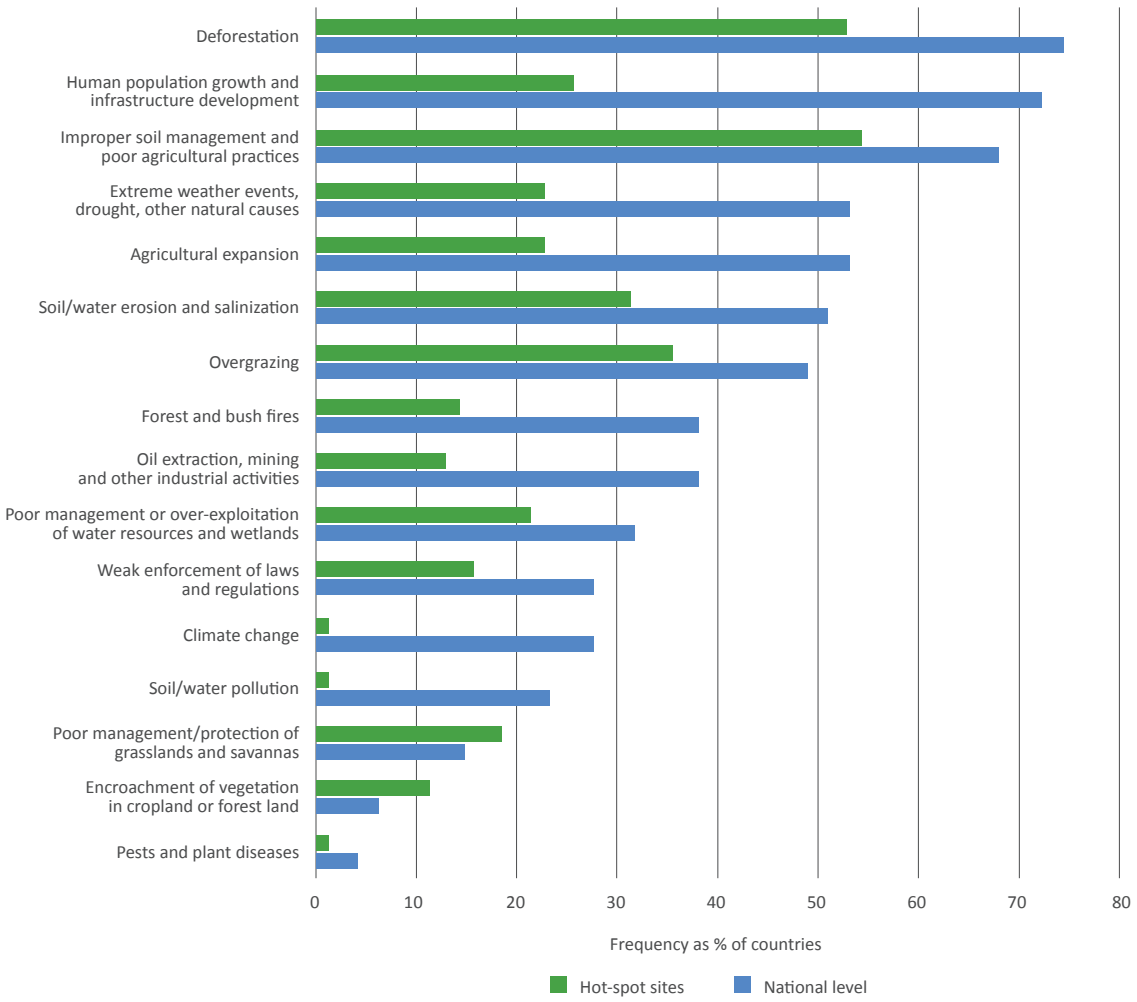
LDN hot-spots are areas particularly exposed to land degradation, identified as a result of the assessment of land degradation trends. To identify the hot-spots, countries followed the criteria indicated in the LDN Target Setting Programme guidelines, which is based on the analysis of land degradation trends (to identify potential sites) and involves field verification to determine the suitability of the identified areas to represent the effects of the main land degradation drivers and trends. Many of the hot-spots are located in areas where degradation is primarily caused by poor land management, deforestation or overgrazing. This confirmed most countries' concerns about the negative influences of anthropogenic actions and unsustainable land exploitation, rather than the effects of natural events.

In general, there is a fair correspondence between the main land degradation drivers at the national level and the ones indicated for the hot-spots (see Figure 2).

Each country defined its own criteria to make final decisions on the selection of hot-spots, but in general, hot-spots are defined as strategic sites where land degradation is more intense, and countries might have the possibility and capacity to closely monitor the sites and verify the efficacy of corrective measures. This is often the reason for choosing hot-spot sites in areas where projects and interventions are either planned or ongoing. Areas where problems are known, and countermeasures identified (or under implementation), are easier to monitor and use as benchmarks to plan interventions in analogous situations. This is consistent with the LDN approach for which hot-spots are expected to become priority areas for action and pilots for testing LDN-related measures.

Monitoring hot-spots is important for achieving LDN. A well-designed benchmarking process enables comparison of the performance of LDN-related measures in given conditions. Metrics to monitor and evaluate the performance of implemented measures over time are to be defined, and this information used for fine-tuning the type and extent of the interventions. Defining comparable cross-country metrics and providing them as part of the LDN technical guidelines is a goal worth pursuing.

Figure 2: Land degradation drivers cited by countries



Source: LDN target setting country reports

Key technical and policy measures to achieve LDN

Countries proposed several key policy measures to achieve LDN in their country reports, such as formulating, promulgating and/or amending existing laws and regulations, as well as improving and integrating land use planning, which included improving capacity for implementation and enforcement. Technical measures to achieve LDN mainly focused on restoring degraded lands, forests and wetlands; improving and expanding protected area networks; managing water catchment areas; integrating coastal programmes; and undertaking conservation or climate smart agriculture, including agroforestry.

Mainstreaming LDN into the annual and medium-term plans of the relevant ministries and agencies, as well as into other related national strategies seemed key for achieving LDN; for example, with those ministries/ agencies coordinating climate change, biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation, and preferably through a central ministry of planning. Strengthening appropriate institutional arrangements and partnerships with local, national, regional and international actors was proposed for effective and scaled up LDN technical and policy measures. There also is a need for the population to be sensitized on the long-term benefits of sustainable land management.

BUILDING BLOCK 4: ACHIEVING LDN

LDN transformative projects and programmes and innovative financing

LDN Transformative Projects and Programmes (TPPs) seek to generate fundamental and sustainable positive change, and should be pursued through interventions at scale while featuring innovations in locally adapted technology, practices and financial mechanisms. Some countries report on-going local 'business as usual' projects, initiatives or funds at the regional and international levels where synergies with LDN could be developed, for example, AFR 100/Bonn Challenge, the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, and international funds from the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, or Adaptation Fund. Some countries also explore investment funds for possible LDN-related funding.

A number of countries cited alternative financing proposals that also relate to LDN, such as eco-tourism, Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), carbon trading and payments, environmental taxes, public-private partnerships. More innovative and potentially significant financing such as 'Sovereign', 'Green' or 'Blue Bonds', or 'blended finance', using a mix of public and private financing, in which public finance de-risks and private or other finance invests, were not always sufficiently explored.

The GM, in collaboration with the UNCDD secretariat, recently developed a checklist[19] to guide country-level project developers and their technical and financial partners in the design of effective LDN TPPs. This checklist is optional, not prescriptive and aims to ensure consistency and completeness in LDN implementation, leading to positive transformation.

The checklist includes features to leverage innovative finance, deliver multiple benefits, promote responsible and inclusive governance and the scale up of what works. The LDN TPP checklist has already been incorporated in the design of transformative projects as a means to ensure that the fundamental features of LDN, gender equality, and environmental and social safeguards are given full consideration and offer countries a good tool to attract financing from traditional as well as new development donors.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

The LDN Target Setting Programme introduced participating countries to the means and metrics to estimate and monitor land degradation by measuring changes in the three LDN sub-indicators and linking them to the main drivers responsible for the depletion of natural resources. This process has systematized the analysis of land degradation at the country level by introducing a methodology based on 'cause and effect' relationships. This enabled the establishment of LDN targets suitable for the relevant national contexts, and – beyond this – the policy framework and legal and institutional environments that are necessary to achieve LDN. The LDN Target Setting Programme has had a strong impact at the country level and changed the paradigm for addressing land degradation in many of the participating countries.

At the technical level, the UNCCD provided guidance, assistance, documents, data and metadata, which allowed all LDN Target Setting Programme participating countries to be active in the programme. The provision of clear methodological notes and internationally available data (the default data) were particularly essential for programme implementation. At the same time, this process raised awareness of data and knowledge gaps that limit capacity to effectively manage and evaluate LDN at the national level.

For the policy and technical measures identified and used during the LDN target setting process to be effective, capacity development at several levels is needed, as well as support for research, development and information and knowledge management. Several countries expect to be further assisted to consolidate knowledge to make the LDN target setting process fully operational and sustainable; however, funds, human resources and capacity building will be vital to achieve these ambitious objectives.

Against this background and based on the main findings from the analysis, the recommendations are as follows:

[19] The draft checklist for LDN Transformative Projects and Programmes is available on the UNCCD Knowledge Hub at https://knowledge.unccd.int/knowledge-products-and-pillars/access-capacity-policy-support-technology-tools/checklist-land

Political leadership

- National governments are strongly committed to achieving LDN. Continued leadership that can strategically guide all relevant sectors must remain at the core for LDN implementation. The established institutional and technical environments to implement the LDN target setting process in each country are key resources to continue working towards the achievement of LDN.
- More focus should be placed on relevant and important leverage entry points for LDN, such as land use plans, national and local budgets, and targeted public and private investments.

National co-ordination

- The national working groups are important for guiding the LDN process and should be encouraged to continue meeting to upgrade and refine LDN data, systems and strategies. The involvement and support of international partners for this endeavour are strongly recommended, and inclusiveness and gender parity of working groups will need to be further improved for effective LDN engagement. Wherever possible, the use of already-existing working groups/steering committees should be encouraged to improve LDN leverage and sustainability and build capacity for more effective mainstreaming of LDN.

Enabling environment

- Countries should include LDN and related elements in upcoming legal amendments and drafting of new bills, and strengthen capacity for the development, monitoring and enforcement of legal provisions surrounding LDN. Countries should improve coordination between institutions involved in LDN and ensure availability and implementation of formalized land use plans.

LDN monitoring

- Countries could further strengthen national and regional information systems and increase technical capacity to appropriately monitor and control land degradation using available tools, such as Collect Earth and Trends. Earth. Improving access to quality and high-resolution data should be encouraged. Closer interaction between national stakeholders and international agencies involved in data and information systems would improve national capacities. International partners, such as the Group on Earth Observations Secretariat, could help to improve data accessibility and support technical workflows to achieve LDN. Thematic sub-groups, such as the LDN geospatial information working groups, could address inter-institutional and cross-country issues related to data sharing, harmonization and systems interoperability.
- At the national level, training on LDN data and monitoring should be provided for the main entities responsible for LDN implementation that report to the UNCCD, as well as the national statistical offices and partners responsible for SDG monitoring/ implementation. A set of verifiable indicators at local and national levels for each LDN target should be defined to enable countries to monitor and evaluate progress and results achieved.
- The LDN hot-spots could be used as pilots and benchmarks for estimating the feasibility of defined LDN targets and the effectiveness of the land degradation countermeasures.
- At the global level, the GM of the UNCCD should monitor the implementation of LDN projects and programmes at all levels to identify and disseminate good practices.

Knowledge sharing

- Country-to-country information exchange mechanisms should be strengthened to facilitate technical dialogues on LDN target identification and comparability across countries.
- South-South cooperation would help to

  (a) share experiences and raise awareness of advanced technologies and techniques and
  (b) develop common strategies and policies

Sharing good examples of achieving LDN and Transformative Projects and Programmes (TPPs) by countries, the GM/UNCCD and other partners is encouraged.

Financing

- To achieve LDN, substantial investment programmes are needed, which include new and innovative financing, such as eco-tourism, carbon payments, or different types of bonds or blended finance (i.e., a mix of public and private financing), and which could target key donors including the Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, the LDN Fund, development banks and others. It is advisable to include more innovative financing options for scaling up LDN programmes, such as different types of public-private financing mixes.

Approach to transformative LDN projects

- The checklist for LDN TPPs has considerable potential to have substantive influence on the design of TPPs as well as on the implementation of LDN, and can be used by donors to inform their funding decisions.
- It is important to mainstream gender dimensions within national LDN efforts. Consideration should also be given to extending this work to explore stronger integration of livelihoods and other co-benefits within LDN strategies and targets.

THE GLOBAL MECHANISM
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

LDN
Land Degradation Neutrality
Target Setting Programme

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