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**BRIEFING
NOTE**

LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY **INTERVENTIONS TO FOSTER GENDER EQUALITY**



Land Degradation Neutrality Interventions to Foster Gender Equality

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LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY INTERVENTIONS TO FOSTER GENDER EQUALITY

KEY MESSAGES

Policymakers and implementers at all levels (national, regional and local) have a major role to play in integrating gender equality into efforts that prevent and mitigate land degradation, including within Land Degradation Neutrality-based initiatives. This can be achieved by taking the following actions:

- ③ **Ensure gender-equal and meaningful participation in land and natural resource governance at the national and landscape levels through:**
 - Inclusive national-level coordination
 - Community and women-led participation, planning and leadership
- ③ **Strengthen and enforce legal protections for the land rights of vulnerable groups and women via:**
 - Legal protections for communities and women
 - Gender-equal land rights
- ③ **Equalize the access, use and control over land, forests and natural resources through:**
 - Better access to technology, services and resources
 - Gender-responsive land and natural resource use and management
- ③ **Close the gender data gap to move toward evidence-based interventions and responses by:**
 - Disaggregating data, gender targets and baselines by sex
 - Tracking the land rights of women and men
 - Pairing land degradation indicators with socio-economic indicators
 - Supplementing PRAIS with gender data
 - Aligning with national, regional and global indicators.





INTRODUCTION

More than a quarter of the earth's land is currently degraded, affecting the lives of 3.2 billion people, particularly smallholder farmers, those in rural communities and the world's poorest populations.¹ Globally, about 74% of people living in poverty are directly affected by land degradation.² The poorest of the world's population are often those who rely on forests for their livelihoods, a disproportionate number of whom are women.³ Indigenous peoples depend heavily on renewable natural resources most threatened by climate change. While they account for 5% of the world's population, indigenous peoples steward around 22% of the Earth's land surface.⁴ Land degradation and climate change pose particularly grave risks to indigenous women and heighten the potential for discrimination they face within and outside their communities.⁵

Widespread land degradation threatens food production, water availability, biodiversity and energy security. When land is degraded and usable land becomes scarce, women are uniquely and differentially affected due to their substantial role in agriculture and food production, their reliance on forests, their greater vulnerability to poverty, and their typically weaker legal protections and social status. Across the world, rural women typically work longer hours than men when accounting for paid productive and unpaid reproductive, domestic or care responsibilities.⁶ They continue to shoulder most of the unpaid and undervalued work, such as collecting water, cooking, cleaning and caretaking, all while battling the impacts of climate change, unpredictable rainfall, natural disasters and non-yielding gardens.

Women constitute the bulk of people who rely on land in many of the regions most affected by desertification, land degradation and drought. One in three people on earth depend directly on agriculture,⁷ while nearly 80% of employed women in least developed countries report agriculture as their primary livelihood.⁸ Women are on the frontline struggle to salvage the large area of agricultural land already affected by soil degradation (52%).⁹ Food availability fluctuations also impact women's role in food production and intra-family food distribution, with women often reducing their nutritional intake and that of their children,¹⁰ with dire health consequences.

Women's input, knowledge and guidance are indispensable to any productive, sustainable efforts to avoid, reduce and reverse degraded land as mandated under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). To realize the full potential of the new Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) approach, the varied roles, priorities, contributions and influences of both women and men in land use and management must be understood, recognized and rewarded. Most major financing mechanisms that include LDN funding streams or can fund LDN initiatives have adopted gender-specific policies, which require all projects to be gender mainstreamed and account for impacts and outcomes in gender equality and women's empowerment. Transformative LDN projects and programmes that overcome gender biases, integrate measures to promote women's empowerment and foster inclusion and equal opportunities stand to leverage and gain co-benefits. Such efforts could also accelerate progress toward reaching multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular those on advancing gender equality, ending poverty, improving food security, mitigating climate change and enriching life on land.

Why gender matters for Land Degradation Neutrality

While women, especially rural and indigenous women, often serve as environmental stewards and keepers of traditional conservation knowledge, unlike men they tend to be excluded from the conservation and management of land and forests, lack access to agricultural extension services and institutional credit, and encounter barriers to participate in the processes of development, planning and policymaking. In addition, women often have less access to information and resources and tend to lack legal rights to land and natural and productive resources. Due to the negative effects of climate change, drought, and dust and sand storms, women and girls in many contexts face daunting challenges in fulfilling their gender-based tasks of fetching water, washing, feeding and caring for their families. Unequal power relations and gender-based discrimination in legal and customary systems in many societies deny women even the right to plant trees, control soil degradation and take measures to enhance soil fertility.

The UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) cautions that poverty is “a root cause, and at the same time a consequence, of land degradation, and gender inequality plays a significant role in land degradation-related poverty.”¹¹ The SPI recognizes that in “most developing countries, land degradation impacts men and women differently, mainly due to unequal access to land, water, credit, extension services and technology.”¹² Subsequently, to successfully tackle land degradation, efforts must thoughtfully address persistent gender inequalities that fuel poverty and marginalization that in turn worsen land degradation. The UNCCD Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) concludes that “understanding the roles and responsibilities of men and women, along with power relations in land management, is a primary requirement to achieving effective outcomes when combating land degradation and implementing gender-responsive and sustainable LDN initiatives.”¹³

“Women are central to successful efforts to manage land sustainably, build resilience and ensure food security, and they play critical roles in agricultural value chains, including in the availability, access and utilization of food.

Source: UNCCD Science-Policy Interface, Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN, 2017

A mandate for gender-responsive approaches to LDN

The UNCCD explicitly stresses gender concerns and women’s roles in addressing land degradation. Numerous Conference of the Parties (COP) declarations and decisions “pledge to address gender inequalities which undermine progress in the implementation of the Convention,”¹⁵ including by recognizing the crucial contributions of gender equality and empowerment of women.¹⁶

Accompanied by a landmark decision on “gender equality and women’s empowerment for the enhanced and effective implementation of the Convention,”¹⁷ the inaugural 2017 UNCCD Gender Action Plan (GAP) further mandates gender mainstreaming in advancing the efforts of countries to achieve their LDN targets.¹⁸ The GAP outlines four priority areas to incorporate into LDN implementation: i) ensure women’s participation in decisions taken during the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to implement the UNCCD; ii) integrate women’s economic empowerment in UNCCD implementation activities in order to eradicate their extreme poverty; iii) strengthen women’s land rights and access to resources; and iv) enhance women’s access to improved knowledge and technologies that relate to effective UNCCD implementation, including LDN.¹⁹

The SPI’s 2017 Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN stresses the unequivocal importance of women to LDN efforts and instructs states to embed gender in the planning and implementation of LDN; mandates preliminary LDN assessments that include the consideration of gender inequality and women’s land tenure security; calls for ensuring women’s genuine contributions to stakeholder engagements, accounting for gender imbalances in power and access to information; and requires the inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data to accurately monitor progress.²⁰

Numerous global consensus documents and human rights conventions embed gender equality into land-related issues, such as in the access to and control of natural and productive resources and land tenure security.²¹ This means, for example, that the 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize women’s land rights as an explicit cross-cutting catalyst for ending poverty (Goal 1), reaching food security and improved nutrition (Goal 2), and achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Goal 5). In addition, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) require gender equality measures in the context of rural reform, climate change, natural disasters, and property and land rights. By integrating gender equality into LDN initiatives, governments fulfil multiple essential commitments toward a more sustainable, just, inclusive and equitable future.

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Empowering women can bring synergies and co-benefits to household food security and sustainable land management Due to women's disproportionate vulnerability to climate change impacts, their inclusion in land management and tenure is constrained. Policies that can address land rights and barriers to women's participation in sustainable land management include financial transfers to women under the auspices of antipoverty programmes, spending on health, education, training and capacity building for women, subsidised credit and program dissemination through existing women's community-based organisations.

Source: IPCC Summary for policymakers. Climate Change and Land. Paragraph C4.4, 2019.

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Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN (2017) by the Science-Policy Interface

Recommended gender-responsive practices include:

- Collect information about both men and women. Ask questions about specific individuals or groups and identify them by sex.
- Collect information from men and women.
- Those collecting and analyzing the data need to understand gender roles and social dynamics, with questions adapted for context.
- Budget and plan for collecting sex-disaggregated data.
- Work with a gender expert early in the process to define the research questions and methodology.
- Make use of FAO's Gender and Land Rights Database which highlights the major political, legal and cultural factors that influence the realization of women's land rights throughout the world.

Growing the LDN target setting process into gender-responsive LDN interventions

With the support of the LDN Target Setting Programme,²² 122 countries directly affected by desertification, land degradation or drought have pledged to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality at the national or sub-national level, and as of July 2019 more than 80 countries have already set voluntary national LDN targets towards halting land degradation by 2030.²³ Many of the targets provide additional benefits to advance gender equality, increase women's access to and control over land and natural resources, improve health and nutrition, reduce poverty, restore ecosystems, and minimize the negative effects of climate change.

About a quarter of the countries have included discussions on the role of gender and women in their LDN target setting reports, with some of them explicitly translating that analysis into pragmatic steps toward gender inclusion and reducing gender inequality. While most countries have not mainstreamed gender into targets and measures, they do make reference to women's roles in ongoing LDN Transformative Projects and Programmes.²⁴

Advancing gender equality in LDN target setting

Bosnia and Herzegovina's LDN target setting report devotes a chapter to gender mainstreaming and LDN focused on aligning LDN programming with national, regional and international legal commitments to gender equality, as well as prioritizing future actions that would tackle gender impacts from climate-induced shocks to agriculture and food security, from women's unequal access to land, resources, technologies and decision-making, especially at the local level, and from their weaker economic position. **Eritrea's** report aims to leverage LDN to empower women, girls and communities, achieved in part through training women's associations and producing gender-sensitive education materials.²⁵ The chapter on transformative projects in **Guyana's** report mandates a gender-responsive approach to address the needs of the most vulnerable (including women), advocating for securing women's land rights and documenting traditional practices to better understand gender roles in land use and management, in order to tailor gender training and awareness activities.²⁶

As gender issues and analysis become increasingly integrated into the LDN target setting process, progress toward the intertwined goals of gender equality and reduced land degradation will be strengthened when national LDN targets are implemented through gender-responsive LDN transformative interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. ENSURE GENDER-EQUAL AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE AT THE NATIONAL AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

In line with the UNCCD Gender Action Plan, the Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN and the Global Mechanism's mandate to support the development of LDN Transformative Projects and Programmes, this section outlines four key recommendations to integrate gender equality into efforts to prevent and mitigate land degradation, including within LDN-based initiatives.²⁷

Women's active engagement, coupled with recognition of their unique knowledge and priorities, has been shown to enhance the effective implementation and sustainability of resilience interventions,²⁸ and must be featured in national LDN frameworks and at project level. While ensuring women's participation in consultation and governance is critical, effective LDN initiatives must go further to dismantle structural barriers and restrictive gender norms that hinder successful land use and management efforts.

Inclusive national-level coordination

National-level inclusion in governance often requires partnerships across ministries, agencies and sectors,

ranging from national equality, women's and human rights bodies to local women's rights organizations, and should be representative of women from diverse backgrounds and identities who experience multiple types of intersecting discriminations.

The UNCCD Gender Action Plan (2017) outlines potential **intervention measures** and proposes four **mechanisms for implementation**:

- Working with women's organizations.
- Developing strategic partnerships to support implementation.
- Mobilizing financial resources to tackle gender inequality in LDN programme implementation.
- Monitoring and reporting on interventions to ensure meaningful results for women in accordance with their needs and priorities.

Good practices in national coordination

Dominica	The <i>Sustainable Land Management Project in the Commonwealth of Dominica</i> included the involvement of the National Council of Women to provide technical support for gender mainstreaming in sustainable land management (SLM). ²⁹
Albania	The project <i>Promoting SLM through Integrated Restoration of Ecosystems in Albania</i> designated the Kolonja Women's Association to lead the development of baseline gender analyses and used quotas to enlist women's participation in training activities. ³⁰
Gambia	The project <i>Community-based Sustainable Dryland Forest Management in Gambia</i> employed the expertise of the Agency for the Development of Women and Children to coordinate participatory gender-based activities in forest conservation. ³¹
Kenya	The constitutionally-created National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) actively engages national ministries, county-level government offices, and public and private actors in gender mainstreaming to produce a government "score card" on gender integration, including on the implementation of environmental provisions under the National Gender Policy and integrating a gender perspective in national climate change plans. ³²

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Promoting gender-responsive participation can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of environmental interventions. In the past, gender-blind land and forest rehabilitation and conservation initiatives – including reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) interventions – have contributed to greater gender inequalities, with women’s access to land and resources further restricted, women’s voice and agenda undermined and their work burden increased.

Source: CRIC, ICCD/CRIC(17)/CRP.1 (16 January 2019), para. 15.

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Community and women-led participation, planning and leadership

Despite increasing numbers of prominent women land and environmental rights defenders and activists, women in affected communities continue to be excluded from land governance and oversight, and rarely head or chair rural councils.³³ As governments increasingly seek to recognize communities’ land rights and set up local land and resource governance structures, the definition of community membership and rights may fail to include women, typically seen as “transient” members of the community who are expected to “marry out” of their birth communities or are treated as “guests” in their husbands’ villages.³⁴ Without full recognition of women – of diverse backgrounds and identities – as community members, they remain marginalized from participation, governance and oversight of land, resource and environmental matters.

Women’s expertise, meaningful participation and leadership are essential in decision-making processes and governance related to LDN projects and programming. Consultation with and outreach to affected women and men from different affected groups must address potential barriers and constraints that prevent them from participating and contributing to planning, design and implementation, as well as from enjoying the benefits from LDN initiatives.³⁵ One successful strategy across several settings has been to draw on community-based groups (such as women’s self-help groups) to set up social mobilization activities and to coordinate rural women’s representation in environmental advocacy.³⁶

Gender-inclusive participation

Lebanon

In *LDN of mountain landscapes in Lebanon*, women are expected to partner (equally) with men in any dialogue initiated by the project on the basis of their role in local innovations related to land rehabilitation, restoration and sustainability, and the priorities of men and women must be accounted for in the project.³⁷

Indonesia

The project *Improving indigenous women’s access to land and participation in natural resource management* (2001-current) targeted landless Kasepuhan women in West Java who were excluded from land-related decision-making and natural resource management. The Indonesian Institute for Forest & Environment (RMI) worked with the Kasepuhan community to raise awareness of the impacts of gender disparities and facilitated the establishment of Kasepuhan women’s organizations where they could learn more about their rights. As a result, women began partaking in forest resource management and in cultivating previously underutilized land, and encouraged reliance on sustainable foraging techniques, pond management and environmental conservation.³⁸

II. STRENGTHEN AND ENFORCE LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR THE LAND RIGHTS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS AND WOMEN

Research shows that when smallholder farmers have secure rights to land, they are more likely to preserve the soil, plant trees and protect forests,³⁹ which form key aspects of the LDN hierarchy of responses to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation. **Countries with more secure land rights tend to have lower rates of deforestation.**⁴⁰ Yet in about half of all countries discriminatory laws or biased social norms curtail women's rights to access, use, inherit, transfer, control, benefit from or own land. In many settings, retrograde gender roles dictate that only men can manage key assets, such as land, and that they have ultimate authority over weighty decisions concerning the control of resources. In contrast, women's rights to land depend on, at times, precarious relationships with their male kin.

Biased laws and social practices often limit the ability of women to invest in conservation and climate-smart strategies, enjoy benefits from LDN initiatives, and provide input into decisions that determine the fate of the lands which they rely on for their livelihoods. Without secure rights to land, women are left without resources and incentives to improve the productivity of their lands in the face of changing climate conditions. Weak legal and social protections for women's land and forest rights increase the likelihood of resorting to practices that degrade the land.

Legal protections for communities and women

Enforceable legal rights to land, especially for women, enhance tenure security and lead to multiple, leveraged benefits for both LDN and gender equality. Studies found that **women with secure land rights benefit from having greater status within the household, an increased role in decision-making and a higher likelihood of investing in soil conservation and agroforestry.**⁴³ Likewise, efforts to bolster the land rights of collectively-held land users, who by some estimates hold 65% of the world's land areas under customary systems,⁴⁴ have led to enhanced land use and management outcomes. A legal analysis of 30 low- and middle-income countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America found that statutory recognition of communal or collectively-held land has been associated with stronger protections for women's

tenure rights, especially when such community-based tenure regimes were motivated by land use rather than conservation goals.⁴⁵

Laws that prohibited economic forms of domestic violence in the surveyed countries reinforced "stronger statutory protections for women's community tenure-specific inheritance rights than do countries reportedly lacking domestic violence legislation."⁴⁶ The study concluded that "[w]omen ...should not be compelled to choose between the recognition of their own tenure rights and those of their larger communities... [and that] **the legal advancement of women and of their communities can, and often do, go hand in hand.**"⁴⁷ Initiatives to align community by-laws with gender-equitable national and international laws, bolstered by inclusive and diverse local governance, have promoted women's land rights by drawing on local legitimacy and broad community support.

Gender-equal land rights

Since land and forest rights, especially for women, are critical for effective LDN outcomes, interventions must be firmly grounded in an analysis of gender differences in land tenure-related livelihood constraints and tenure security that could impact women's and men's resilience, abilities, incentives and opportunities to invest in and contribute to climate change adaptation and long-term LDN interventions. Women and men typically have different rights and duties based on land types (e.g., agricultural land, forests, watersheds/coastal land, mountains, protected areas), land governance and legal regimes (e.g., private, family, collective/communal, public land), as well as their familial and social status.

The landscape approach to LDN thus requires a thoughtful and nuanced gender analysis of men and women's rights and land tenure security per land type, sector and jurisdiction (e.g., customary or indigenous law, communal and individual land rights) to identify and plan for the removal of gender-based constraints to fully realize LDN benefits. Such a baseline analysis would also ensure adequate monitoring and reporting on progress anticipated by the proposed transformative LDN project.



Better LDN outcomes linked to gender-responsive land rights protections

Ethiopia	The land certification and registration process undertaken in Ethiopia in the early 2000s exemplifies benefits that come with security of tenure, boosting the likelihood of landowners to invest in soil and water conservation measures by 20 to 30%. As a result, the income and agricultural outputs of landowners have increased.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the process included women by mandating the issuance of land certificates in the names of both spouses as joint holders, and the consent of both as a prerequisite to selling or renting land. States that had dedicated space on the land certificate form for photos of both spouses had a higher rate of joint certification.⁴⁹ Local committees that defined the boundaries of common-use areas and registered the plots of individual farmers included women who headed households, widows and divorced women, and were supplemented by local participation and legitimation to guarantee women's land rights under customary tenure systems in rural areas.
Rwanda	The new legal framework for land registration aimed to increase the land tenure security of vulnerable groups, including for women. The participatory and community-led process required at least 30% of representatives of all land committees to be women. Both men and women had to be present during registration of land ownership, ensuring joint title of married property owners. Children were registered as individuals with beneficial interests in their parents' land, ensuring equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters. Women's land rights were protected in land transactions, as land transfer template forms required the consent of both spouses. With their names on land parcels, women were able to use the land as collateral for loans from banks and microfinance institutions.⁵⁰ Research found that following the 2006 land registration programme, registered owners were over two times more likely to invest in conservation measures than unregistered owners. The likelihood was even higher for women-headed households,⁵¹ as women with formalized land rights were 19% more likely to engage in soil conservation, compared to 10% among men.⁵²
Peru	Peru recognizes the autonomy and property rights of indigenous and peasant communities to set their own membership and governance rules. In the Sierra region, women were generally excluded from governance structures, and were often deemed to be unqualified community members, including in instances when men would migrate for work and women would take the helm at the farm. A local network of non-government organizations facilitated targeted interventions to train indigenous and rural women on gender equality and land rights, leadership and negotiation skills and arranged experience exchanges between rural women leaders at the local, national and regional levels; advised and prepared women ahead of participation in land governance meetings; increased community awareness of the importance of women's engagement; encouraged modification of community laws to uphold the rights of women to participate in decision-making and to hold land; and helped communities to develop proposals for funding from local governments. Several communities now mandate women's rights to participation and decision-making and certify both men and women as qualified community members, effectively discarding outmoded head-of-household notions (which previously only counted widows and single mothers).⁵³
Senegal	A Feed the Future project allocated parcels of degraded and abandoned land to women and provided them with training and inputs in exchange for land restoration.⁵⁴ The intervention increased the women's knowledge of agricultural techniques and diverse sources of nutrition, appointed them as gatekeepers of new technologies (such as biofortified foods), enabled equal participation in governance-related activities and provided access to land. By 2014, the programme had 52 locations over 80 hectares, benefitting nearly 4,000 women.⁵⁵ The programme delivered on securing women's land rights, which boosted incentives for restoring land and promoted sustainable agricultural practices. The women used innovative conservation agricultural techniques to increase land productivity and harvests, sustain low maintenance and micro-nutrient-rich crops and access new income streams.⁵⁶

III. EQUALIZE THE ACCESS, USE AND CONTROL OVER LAND, FORESTS AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Women typically own less land and have less secure rights over land than men.⁵⁷ Women make up, on average, fewer than 20% of the world's landholders,⁵⁸ with a wide range across countries.⁵⁹ Studies show that the person who owns and controls the assets within a household also controls household decision-making and resource allocation,⁶⁰ including on consumption, human capital investment and intergenerational transfers.⁶¹ These realities curtail efforts to maximize household and individual investments in LDN interventions, combining conservation, prevention, rehabilitation and restoration of degraded land.⁶²

Better access to technology, services and resources

Women are also generally less likely to know about, and have access to, technical information and convergence services to help improve land use and sustainability, such as extension services, inputs,

new technologies for sustainable land management, and loans and credit for climate-smart or drought-resistance investments.⁶³ The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) estimates that if women around the world had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30% and raise total agricultural output by 2.5 to 4%, which could save 100 to 150 million people from hunger.⁶⁴ Women are less likely to have access to markets and to potential alternative livelihoods. Women may lack risk-management expertise and insurance, and they are often excluded from programmes geared towards “landowners” or leaders.⁶⁵ Land-use conflicts, including those sparked by struggles over increasingly scarce land and the competing needs for crop production and grazing, often disproportionately impact women. Research suggests that women make more socially-oriented land use decisions that focus on improving the welfare of the entire household and/or community, which tend to lead to reduced incidences of conflict.⁶⁶

Women-led equitable access and benefit-sharing in a land restoration project in Niger

The Initiative for Women and Land (Initiative Femmes et Terroirs) in Niger (2011-2015) targeted Women's Village Savings and Loan Association groups (known by the local name, *Mata Masa Dubara*, roughly translated to “enlightened women” or “women on the move”).

These women's associations brought their decade-long management experience to develop a social enterprise to manage degraded pastoral land in the Tambaraoua community. They formed a mixed-gender community management committee to guide community restoration actions by clearing 50 hectares of degraded land of an invasive weed, reseeding the area with locally-available grass species useful for fodder and planting the area with seedlings to produce gum arabic.

The group employed village men, women and youth to implement annual weeding, seeding and grass cutting, and established a village surveillance committee to guard against illegal grazing or cutting. Since managing the community's lands has traditionally been assigned to men, the women strategically created a village management committee with a male majority representation to ensure their buy-in and support for the action, but reserved key management positions within the committee for women in order to give them control of critical elements of the enterprise's governance and financial management. Through the committee they codified by-laws on the enterprise's governance and revenue sharing to distribute revenue between the enterprise, the protection committee and local authorities, as well as governmental technical services and the village treasury.

Ensuring equitable and inclusive sharing of benefits and payments from cash-and-carry fodder sales for labour costs to create jobs and to compensate efforts of all the major stakeholders encouraged overall buy-in and preempted potential conflict about benefits and revenue sharing. The village continued operations independently after the project's closure, continuing to reap robust economic gains, and observed the return of wildlife that had disappeared from the area.⁶⁷

Gender-responsive land and natural resource use and management

Equalizing women's access to and control over productive and natural resources could amplify and accelerate LDN outcomes, especially if interventions at the national and landscape levels account for such gender gaps in designing and executing land use and management policies and measures. Effective LDN interventions would therefore account for potential increases in labour and time burdens on women, especially given their existing disproportionate care responsibilities and when considering the often limited

financial means of women to access and invest in experimental practices, hire additional workers, pay for costly inputs, and address women's generally lower social status and authority when it comes to land-related decisions. Successful LDN measures include empowering female farmers who rely on rain-fed subsistence agriculture by providing targeted agricultural extension services to address their specific needs,⁶⁸ increasing the food production capacity of poor female and male farmers or providing livelihood support for fisherwomen and fishermen (taking into account their differentiated needs, concerns and abilities).⁶⁹

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Women are central to successful efforts to manage land sustainably, build resilience and ensure food security, and they play critical roles in the agricultural value chain including the availability, access and utilization of food.

Source: UNCCD Science Policy Interface, Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN, 2017

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Better land use and management depends on closing gender gaps in access to land and natural resources

Central African Republic	The project <i>Enhancing Agro-ecological Systems in the Northern Prefectures of Central African Republic</i> (2016) prioritizes women because of their heavier productive, reproductive and community-based workloads and the existence of land-related gender disparities. It targets eight million women by focusing on women's access to land; enhanced organizational capacity of women's producer groups; inclusive investment and growth opportunities for women; gender-sensitive early warning systems; pro-women services centered on the creation of ecological value chains and technologies to reduce women's work time and increase their productivity; and the recruitment of a gender and socio-economic development specialist to enhance gender mainstreaming. ⁷⁰
Dominica	The project <i>Sustainable Land Management in the Commonwealth of Dominica</i> (2017) aligns with the country's national gender policy by stressing the harms of violence against women fueled by inequality as well as by demonstrating the need for gender-responsive strategies in land-based projects. The gender co-benefits draw on an understanding of ecosystem benefits for women (benefit-sharing), the initiation of gender-sensitive knowledge management by using sex-disaggregated data and language in publications and photos to avoid entrenching stereotypes, and the relative positions of women, men and youth in terms of access to (and benefit from) the knowledge created. ⁷¹
Jordan	An agricultural resource management project, <i>Mainstreaming Sustainable Land Management Practices</i> , 2010-2015, focused on building local and national capacities and improving income-generating activities, especially for women. The strategy sought to improve the quality of life of rural communities affected by land degradation and consisted of gender-sensitive empowerment of communities by supporting and embedding SLM best practices at the local level and in national frameworks. The project reported significant agroecosystem restoration, reduced erosion and improved biodiversity. Socio-economic impacts included reliable water supply, increased productivity and community empowerment, especially of women, who received tailored training and gained access to income-generating activities and credit. ⁷²
Uganda	In northern Uganda, district governments sought to scale up climate-smart agriculture (CSA). The project found that women's lack of access to productive resources relegated them to subsistence production, constraining the surpluses they might otherwise produce and could market. To remedy the gender imbalance and to leverage CSA uptake, the project encouraged mixed-gender farmer groups to enable women to access productive resources through these programmes; set targets for equal numbers of men and women to partake in trainings; promoted climate-smart technologies that reduce workloads for women, increase productivity and enable women to gain additional income from selling their own crops; and urged newly formed farmer cooperatives to include women in leadership roles and "treat them equally" (explained as giving them "equal opportunity to get what men get, do what men do, learn what men learn and sell their products at the same prices as men"). As a result of the project, over 1,500 hectares of land enjoy CSA and SLM practices, 100,000 agroforestry trees were planted, and the average maize and bean crop yield has tripled in project sites. ⁷³

“

Parties will seek to build the knowledge capacities of female land-users in the areas targeted for sustainable land management to deliver appropriate technological resources, including information technologies, sustainable land management, training, extension services and the education of girls.

Source: UNCCD Gender Action Plan (2017)

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IV. CLOSE THE GENDER DATA GAP TO MOVE TOWARD EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS AND RESPONSES

Better sex-disaggregated data can revolutionize and improve government-led processes to craft evidence-based LDN interventions and to empower communities and women to monitor and enforce their land and natural resource rights. Over 120 countries have committed to set national LDN targets, including establishing national baselines and associated measures to achieve LDN. To monitor and assess LDN progress, three key indicators are used: 1) land cover, 2) land productivity and 3) carbon stocks. While seemingly gender-neutral, measuring the progress of these LDN indicators requires tracking and monitoring social and economic progress by the men, women and households affected by and contributing to land degradation and its rehabilitation. The SPI mandates that monitoring of LDN efforts must sex-disaggregate indicators and cautioned that “if gender is excluded from the analysis of preliminary assessment data (e.g., poorly selected indicators, lack of advanced planning for the disaggregation of data by sex), then the findings will be incomplete or misleading.”⁷⁴

Disaggregate data, gender targets and baselines by sex

At a minimum, LDN transformative project result frameworks should disaggregate indicator data by sex (as well as by age, relevant identity and other social status factors), where such data is available, to enable baseline and follow-up progress tracking or to identify gaps where such disaggregated information is lacking at the national or sub-national level. Results indicators

should examine gender differences with respect to participation; decision-making in projects from inception to delivery; women’s and men’s differing land rights, access to and use of land and resources; and how project interventions plan to mitigate and erase such differences. Such data would be critical to demonstrate effective impact analyses and gender-related changes in society and the environment over time.⁷⁵

To accurately capture local knowledge, project impacts, successes and shortfalls, information and data must be gathered against an initial gender-informed baseline, complete with sex-disaggregated indicators and gender targets. LDN transformative projects “employ science based and local and indigenous knowledge as well as best practices including sustainable land management that contributes to land-based climate change adaptation and mitigation [and] capture and disseminate what is learned from the interventions and identify ways to address knowledge gaps through accessing all knowledge forms, and where necessary conducting research”⁷⁶ by specifically targeting affected women of varied social groups and backgrounds for their expertise and inputs. The GAP reinforces the importance of scaling-up actions that build on “enhancing women’s access to improved knowledge and technologies that relate to effective UNCCD implementation” by drawing on indigenous and rural women’s “valuable knowledge which is needed in order to increase food production.”⁷⁷

Gender-sensitive data for more accurate and effective interventions

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan	UN Women provided extensive training to government staff and civil society groups to improve gender sensitivity and enhance understanding of the laws governing land rights. Capacity development activities also targeted local governments, and heads of village councils heard directly from women about women’s land rights violations and about laws relevant to women’s inheritance and land. Village and district-level land specialists were further trained on gender-sensitive data collection to better enable them to respond to rural women’s concerns and provide more accurate information to inform policy and implementation reform. ⁷⁸
Guyana	The Government of Guyana increased awareness and facilitated the participation of women in UNCCD implementation initiatives. ⁷⁹ The government participated in the UNCCD’s global <i>LDN Target Setting Programme</i> to establish targets to combat land degradation. ⁸⁰ Programme activities included a national survey to identify land degradation hot-spots, with the participation of over 205 men and 241 women, identifying and addressing issues arising at the intersection of gender, land use and land management, and engaging in gender-responsive monitoring and reporting. ⁸¹



Track the land rights of women and men

While land rights, especially for women engaged in agriculture, are critical for LDN, there is currently no global or consistent national data on the true scope of women's land and natural resource rights.⁸² Several goals and indicators of the internationally-endorsed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be leveraged to provide missing sex- and social status-disaggregated data relevant to land issues. UNCCD country Parties endorsed linking the implementation of the Convention to the SDGs, in particular to target 15.3 and its associated indicator 15.3.1: Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area.⁸³

Linking SDG 15 indicators with other SDG land indicators would help supplement and leverage the data toward a more holistic picture of LDN and gender equality efforts. For example, SDG indicators 1.4.2 (under Goal 1 on ending poverty), 5.a.1 and 5.a.2 (under Goal 5 on gender equality) provide global guidance to governments on tallying data on women's land rights in law and in practice, both formally documented and based on women's (and men's) perceptions of the security of their land rights.⁸⁴ Requiring and gathering disaggregated data and gender-specific indicators would crystalize evidence on the links between greater land tenure security (for women) and greater uptake and sustainability of conservation techniques to protect, prevent and reverse land degradation.

Pair land degradation indicators with socio-economic indicators

Land degradation assessments and land productivity and watershed evaluations likewise require socio-economic indicators and analysis to gauge impact. Other seemingly gender-neutral measurements, such as drought (Standardized Precipitation Index, Palmer Drought Severity Index), rainfall variability (inter-annual rainfall variability, rainfall seasonality index, precipitation intensity) aridity and precipitation trends, also carry gender implications. For example, understanding men and women's different roles and experiences due to these weather phenomena would help identify hot-spots and high-risk areas for optimum impact from planned LDN interventions. Conducting additional gender-specific qualitative research and capturing case studies help to complement and nuance the quantitative data to produce more accurate evaluations and evidence about strategies and interventions that can be scaled out and up.

Supplement PRAIS with gender data

Since 2018, national reporting on the implementation and progress of the UNCCD, including on LDN outcomes, utilizes the template tools of the **Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS)**.⁸⁵ In completing the PRAIS template, country Parties are urged to provide complementary information to report on sex-disaggregated data for requested indicators, as well as to present additional data on gender-sensitive performance, impact targets and qualitative data about progress (or challenges) on UNCCD implementation, including those related to gender equality goals for LDN (and related) UNCCD initiatives.

Possible indicators for LDN interventions

Depending on the LDN intervention, indicators could:

- Track improvements on the situation of indigenous women, who face very different climate change adaptation challenges from that of indigenous men (owing to the gendered division of labour in indigenous cultures), and also from other women, such as female farm workers;⁸⁶
- Set targets to achieve equal participation and representation of women and men, especially in decision-making processes and bodies under the project (in case of a low baseline, aim to progressively increase targets for the project throughout the implementation timeframe);⁸⁷ and
- Adapt to the project-level SDG indicators 1.4.2 (under Goal 1 on ending poverty) and 5.a.1 and 5.a.2 (under Goal 5 on gender equality), to capture the extent to which laws and practices afford women and men equal and secure access to land use, control and ownership.

Align with national, regional and global indicators

LDN efforts should track compliance, impacts and outcomes from the interventions, in line with national policy commitments, as well as from regional and global standards on land rights and governance, sustainable development, human rights and gender equality. For example, project indicators and targets could be patterned after or inform other required compliance reporting, such as for the SDG indicators on ending poverty, food security, gender equality, land and climate change mitigation; for the Rio Conventions; for human rights treaty monitoring

mechanisms (such as periodic reporting to the ICESCR and CEDAW);⁸⁸ for progress reporting under international consensus agreements, such as the Beijing Platform for Action on women's rights (the 25-year review is in 2020); for normative compliance with gender equality in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and for land governance under the Voluntary Guidelines of the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT).



CONCLUSION

Sustainable and successful land degradation efforts require paying attention to the most affected and vulnerable communities and groups. As available arable land rapidly disappears due to competing demand and environmental harms, rural communities and women in particular increasingly find themselves dispossessed, displaced and destined to extreme poverty. Landlessness and weak land rights are key root causes, the consequences of which are poverty and hunger, conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation.⁸⁹ When a gender-balanced approach is implemented, in particular to engage women to

meaningfully partake in decision-making on land and natural resources, help plan and lead land degradation interventions, and enjoy secure land rights, myriad benefits materialize. By fostering gender equality through LDN interventions, such programmes not only become more effective in conserving land and mitigating the negative effects of climate change, they can also propel progress across multiple Sustainable Development Goals ranging from eradicating poverty to improved food security and nutrition, better health outcomes and advancing social equity within and across borders.⁹⁰



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Global Mechanism of the UNCCD

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