

UNCCD United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

THE GLOBAL MECHANISM

Land Degradation Neutrality: The Target Setting Programme





FOREWORD BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

In September 2015, 17 global goals for sustainable development (the SDGs) were adopted by world leaders, meeting at the United Nations in New York. These bold, transformative and universal goals are our roadmap for the next 15 years.

In this brochure, we set out the case for the full implementation of goal 15 "Life on Land". In particular, we highlight how UNCCD Parties are working together to achieve target 15.3 on land degradation neutrality (LDN). At this stage, we are losing around 12 million hectares of land each year. We need to stop this critical loss and turn this trend around. Literally speaking, the health and productivity of the ground that we stand on will determine the future prosperity and security of humankind.

Land degradation neutrality is a simple but revolutionary idea that can connect the dots between most global goals and targets. It is a commitment to avoid degradation, to move towards sustainable land management and at the same time to massively scale up the rehabilitation of degraded land and soil. It may come to redefine our relationship with the nature.

It is the simplest response to climate change action, food, energy and water security, forced migration and resource-driven conflict. By safeguarding life on land, we deliver for all, life on Earth. By 2030, we envision a world where we stop the loss of this vital asset and move into positive territory. By reaching Land degradation neutrality, we establish the basis for communities – all citizens - everywhere - to not just survive but to thrive by building a future on a healthy and productive foundation.

I invite Parties and other interested stakeholders who share this ambitious vision to join us. By establishing and then implementing voluntary national targets for land degradation neutrality, we can deliver multiple benefits now, and set future generations on the path to real sustainability.



Monique Barbut
Executive Secretary
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: RESTORING THE BALANCE

On 25 September 2015, world leaders at the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets. An evolution of the Millennium Development Goals, they set out what all countries should strive to achieve in order to restore a balance between humans and their environment.

SDG 15 AND TARGET 15.3

Of particular relevance for the UNCCD is Goal 15, which 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, Target 15.3 - the target championed by UNCCD and partner countries - was also adopted. This reads, "By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world".

Target 15.3 has therefore become a strong vehicle to drive UNCCD implementation, while at the same time contributing to other SDGs, including those relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, food and water security, disaster risk reduction, and poverty reduction.

The 2030 Agenda and its target 15.3 places the UNCCD firmly in the context of the hugely important climate action agenda.

This target is our roadmap for the next 15 years.



The twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD (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".

LDN is a simple idea and a powerful tool. It means securing enough healthy and productive resources by avoiding degradation whenever possible, better managing the land, and restoring the land we have already degraded.

It is about achieving a balance between three processes: use/degradation, rehabilitation/restoration and sustainable land management.

At its core are better land management practices and better land use planning. It can help us secure economic, social and political resilience and opportunity for millions.

LDN will deliver multiple benefits: How we manage the land is closely linked to food and water security; to climate change mitigation and adaptation; to stemming forced migration and negative urbanization trends; to creating decent jobs; to promoting responsible consumption and countering resource conflict.

At the UNCCD we are working to make the concept of Land Degradation Neutrality a reality by 2030, by translating the target into a number of practical tools and providing guidance for Parties and other stakeholders. Our aim is to see the implementation of transformational projects gathering pace with tangible positive changes on the ground, particularly in those countries that establish voluntary LDN targets.

At COP 12 in Ankara, Turkey, in October 2015, UNCCD country Parties reached a breakthrough agreement on LDN:

- COP agreed that Parties would play an important role in the follow-up on the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- COP acknowledged that SDG target 15.3 is a strong vehicle for driving implementation of the UNCCD and endorsed a working definition of LDN.
- COP noted that a significant proportion of land degradation occurs beyond arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas.
- COP invited all countries to formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN.
- COP instructed the UNCCD, "as the lead organization for Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD)" to take initiative to seek cooperation to achieve SDG target 15.3, including providing "guidance for formulating national LDN targets and initiatives"; and facilitating "the use of the UNCCD indicator framework as a contribution to the monitoring, evaluation and communication of progress towards the national LDN targets".

The COP 12 decisions have placed the UNCCD at the centre of the global sustainable development agenda, not only through SDG target 15.3 but also through a greater understanding of the Convention's relevance beyond arid lands and the relationship between LDN and climate change. COP 12 has given the UNCCD a clear game plan and direction for the next 15 years – now the challenge is to capitalize on this momentum.

SO HOW DO WE MEASURE LDN?

In the past few years, national governments have agreed to global and regional targets and commitments to halt and reverse land degradation and restore degraded land. These include the Aichi Biodiversity Targets - one of which aims to restore at least 15% of degraded ecosystems; the Bonn Challenge and related regional initiatives (e.g. LAC 20x20, AFR100) to restore more than 350 million hectares; and, most recently, the SDGs, in particular SDG target 15.3.

Yet many countries currently lack the necessary methods, data and expertise to set baselines and monitor and report on progress against land degradation.

In March 2016, the UN Statistical Commission approved a draft global indicator framework intended for the follow-up and review of progress towards the SDGs at the global level. The SDG indicator 15.3.1 and its sub-indicators are recognized as suitable metrics for monitoring and reporting on restoration, combatting desertification and achieving land degradation neutrality, the primary aims of SDG target 15.3.

The indicator proposed for SDG target 15.3 is:

"Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area" (referred to as SDG indicator 15.3)

The three sub-indicators are:

- land cover and land cover change
- land productivity
- carbon stocks above and below ground

While reporting should be based primarily on official national data, global available data sets and Earth observations can be used to fill data gaps and can be ground-truthed and validated during reporting cycles. The UNCCD, in close collaboration with relevant partners, is taking the lead in compiling data for global reporting since i) the sub-indicators are already part of the UNCCD country reporting mechanism and ii) the UNCCD, with the support of a number of international partners and implementing agencies, is already building capacity in 80+ countries for implementing and monitoring SDG target 15.3.

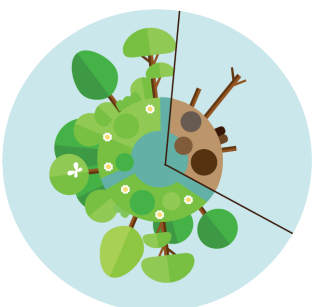
The UNCCD will develop "good practice guidance" with well-defined methodologies and "decision trees" using a tiered approach to data use and validation and the LDN Conceptual Framework developed by UNCCD's Science Policy Interface.

Framework for Monitoring and Reporting on SDG Target 15.3

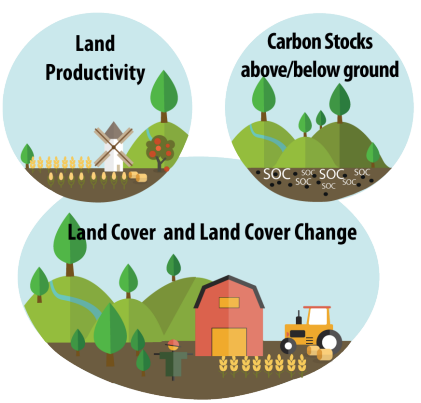
Land Productivity refers to the biological productive capacity of the land, the source of all the food, fiber, and fuel that sustains humans. Land productivity can be calculated across large areas from Earth observation data on net primary productivity (NPP). Estimates of NPP, using vegetation indices, are influenced in the short-term by crop phenology, rainfall, nutrient fertilization and other variables which must be corrected for to accurately interpret trends. National authorities are best able to determine whether declining levels of land productivity are considered land degradation by taking into account local circumstances.

National Data is envisaged to be primarily used, to the greatest extent possible, to derive the sub-indicators and other relevant indicators and information at the country level, covering bio-physical, governance and socio-economic conditions as well as the status of land resources. National Data can be collected through existing sources (maps, databases, reports), including participatory inventories on existing land management systems and their characteristics

Indicator 15.3.1
Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area



Sub -Indicators
UNCCD (CBD, UNFCCC)
Reporting Mechanisms



Data from multiple sources
FAO, GEF and other Reporting Mechanisms

Official Statistics and Earth Observation



Land Use and Management Practices



Surveys, Sampling and Citizen Sourcing



Carbon Stocks (Above and Below Ground) give an indication of the amount of carbon in living and decomposing biomass above and below ground, including soil organic carbon. Carbon stocks are elementary to a wide range of ecosystem services and reflect land use and management practices. These stocks, including for soil organic carbon, can be estimated by applying carbon density values from ground-based measurements or national inventories in conjunction with land cover maps derived from Earth observation data. National authorities are best able to estimate trends in carbon stocks that indicate land degradation by taking into account local circumstances.

Land Cover and Land Cover Change, most often derived from Earth observation, is a fundamental parameter that assists with the interpretation and stratification of the other two sub-indicators. It is also essential for monitoring and reporting on multiple SDG targets focused on natural resource management, food and water security, environmental health and rural/urban planning for sustainable development. For global comparisons, countries are encouraged to use standardized land cover classification systems. National authorities are best able to determine whether land cover change is considered land degradation by taking into account local circumstances.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
Convention on Biological Diversity
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
STAP Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the Global Environment Facility

The knowledge gained will be vital to track progress and to design effective public policies that can help countries achieve Target 15.3. It is, in the first instance, a question of knowing the extent of the land degradation problem while understanding the socio-economic, demographic and environmental drivers and vulnerabilities. Then it is a matter of setting bold, ambitious targets and managing the inevitable trade-offs. Transformational projects and targeted policy should aim to reduce the formidable pressure on land while bringing back lost land into a state of health and productivity.



As a globally agreed target, LDN can be used to galvanize action to address land degradation in all terrestrial ecosystems across entire landscapes. Recognising that LDN is just a milestone on the road to the full health of the terrestrial ecosystem, it is nonetheless tough and ambitious.

While the SDG agenda is global, practical solutions will be needed at the country and landscape levels. Achieving LDN requires a paradigm shift in land stewardship: from 'degrade-abandon-migrate' to 'protect-sustain-restore'. It is at this scale that natural resources and ecosystem services are best managed, since this is where people live their daily lives and feel the benefits of rehabilitation and restoration.

This means synergy between various sectors and national sustainable development plans that embrace complementary management options:

- avoiding land degradation through land use planning that fully accounts for the potential and resilience of land resources;
- adopting sustainable land management policies and practices in order to minimize current land degradation; and
- rehabilitating/restoring degraded lands.

This is the rationale that underpins the LDN Target Setting Programme that became operational in spring 2016. Through this programme the UNCCD's operational arm - The Global Mechanism - is supporting countries in their national voluntary LDN target setting processes.

The main objective of the programme is to enable country Parties to define national baselines and to identify voluntary targets and measures to achieve LDN by 2030. The Programme also feeds into the UNCCD's 2016-19 work plan and its outcome indicator, "The extent to which affected country Parties establish targets for addressing land degradation and rehabilitation".

LDN BASELINE SETTING: Providing information on methodologies and approaches related to the assessment of the LDN baseline at country level; identifying priority areas for LDN implementation; supporting national LDN data processing units to pinpoint, gathering and processing suitable (sub)national data; and providing default estimates from global data sources to complement national data.

LDN MEASURES AND TARGETS: Setting measurable, verifiable, time-bound national voluntary targets and identifying specific measures to achieve these targets based on an analysis of the drivers of land degradation.

LDN INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES: Identifying priority areas for viable LDN investments, including scalable success stories and large-scale transformative LDN projects to achieve LDN. These proposals address the identified measures for LDN implementation at subnational level and thus contribute to the achievement of LDN.

LDN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS: Under government leadership, facilitating stakeholder participation in the LDN target setting process. The Programme will support the functioning of national LDN working groups, bringing together key stakeholders, including national government and state agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations, the scientific community, and development partners. The Programme may also support national consultation workshops to discuss and validate the LDN baseline and measures defined.



The engagement of the Global Mechanism in national LDN target setting processes will ensure coherence, leverage, joint learning and global analysis:

COHERENCE: Providing a coherent methodological approach to LDN data sourcing and assessment in cooperation with global data providers.

LEVERAGE: Ensuring the consistent and synergistic use of multi-partner funding, facilitating the transition from the identification of LDN baselines and measures to LDN implementation.

JOINT LEARNING: Sharing experiences and lessons-learned within and between countries.

GLOBAL ANALYSIS: Providing consistent information on regional and global LDN trends, based on internationally agreed indicator frameworks.



PROGRAMME SYNERGIES

Creating synergies is at the heart of the Programme.

The Programme enhances Global Mechanism efforts to support the development of transformative LDN project proposals, which help countries to translate priority LDN measures into investment opportunities based on scalable good practice examples.

The Programme builds on the successful LDN pilot project implemented by 14 LDN champion countries in 2014-15 and takes into account the lessons learned as well as the outcomes of an independent evaluation. The indicators used to monitor progress towards LDN targets will also be used to inform the UNCCD reporting process with regard to progress towards the UNCCD strategic objectives, thus supporting Parties' reporting.

The Programme identifies and harnesses synergies between LDN target setting and countries´ efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Most national climate plans include land-based activities that contribute directly to the achievement of LDN and vice versa. The identified land-climate interlinkages will help identify critical entry points to more effectively tap into climate finance, for instance, from the Green Climate Fund.



The Programme team includes UNCCD staff, national and regional experts, contracted service providers and partner organizations.

While country level work is spearheaded by UNCCD's National Focal Points and supported by national/regional consultants, UNCCD staff also engage with countries to facilitate high level political engagement and ensure quality control.

A steering committee includes UNCCD staff and all international and implementing partners involved in the LDN target setting programme, to provide overall guidance for programme implementation.



PROGRAMME FUNDING

The programme has been possible thanks to the commitment of various technical and financing partners, including the Global Environment Facility, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the United Nations Development Programme, France, Germany, the Republic of Korea (through the Changwon Initiative), Luxembourg, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turkey (though the Ankara Initiative).



To launch the LDN target setting process, regional inception workshops are being organized between May and October 2016. The LDN Pilot countries will be holding a "lessons learned workshop" for all participating countries in October 2016.

The workshops will help participants navigate the complexity of defining bold LDN targets, walking them through the steps of the LDN conceptual framework and policy cycle, and providing information on existing data and methodologies to support the mainstreaming of LDN into the national SDG implementation agenda.

In particular, the workshops will address the scope, work plan and timeframe, implementation arrangements, working modalities, communication and reporting procedures, and will facilitate the elaboration of draft country work plans, including deliverables, deadlines and budget.

Workshop participants will include: UNCCD National Focal Points; LDN country and regional experts; LDN target-setting partners; and workshop host institutions. Broad stakeholder participation at national level will be ensured through national LDN working groups, including the private sector.

To take part in the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme, UNCCD National Focal Point Institution should submit a letter of expression of interest to: LDNtargetsetting@unccd.int





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To find out more, please visit:
www.global-mechanism.org/content/supporting-countries-set-land-degradation-neutrality-targets

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