

Joint UNCCD – IUCN management response: Terminal evaluation of the land degradation neutrality target setting project

Overview

The evaluation report concerning the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Project (LDN TSP) provides information of the results and the process of supporting 106 countries in establishing national voluntary LDN targets and the baseline data necessary for measuring progress against those targets, as carried out by the Global Mechanism (GM) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The UNCCD Secretariat, the GM and IUCN welcome the evaluation report as a carefully crafted, focused and informative assessment of the LDN TSP. It is a timely input to the considerations on the future work on LDN, with many concrete ideas to improve and develop further activities.

The evaluation report ably (re-)constructs a theory of change for the LDN-TSP, which organizes the various components of the project to a logical continuum and spells out the expected (causal) linkages between the outputs and outcomes/impact. The theory of change is used in the report to demonstrate the progress made, and to point out the areas where further work is needed. This clarifies the conceptual setting of the LDN TSP, its successes and remaining challenges, which will be useful for the further development and targeting of LDN activities by the UNCCD institutions and IUCN.

The UNCCD Secretariat, the GM and IUCN appreciate the generally positive findings about the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of LDN TSP, as well as the confidence that the evaluation report shows about the likelihood of sustaining the project results and generating the expected impact. The recommendations of the report offer practical ways forward in this context, and they are also well in line with the current LDN approach and process priorities of the UNCCD.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The UNCCD Secretariat and the GM, in collaboration with IUCN and other key partners, should develop a more systematic approach to LDN knowledge management, learning and outreach. The approach should comprise at least the following components:

- Continuous scanning of the LDN environment to identify the main knowledge gaps faced by countries that are working towards LDN
- When knowledge gaps are identified, development of appropriate responses / products to address those gaps (the range of knowledge ‘products’ can and should be broad, including written material, web-based briefings, peer-learning events, direct technical advice)
- Organisation and facilitation of regular peer-to-peer learning events at regional and global levels (formal and informal platforms should be used, whether during COP meetings, or simply through periodic Skype conferences)
- Development of targeted outreach / awareness raising products that are segmented for specific audiences (e.g. politicians, policy-makers, private sector actors, land users)

The evaluation found that the most immediate, pressing knowledge gaps to address are how to identify, develop and finance transformative projects and programmes and – directly related to this – how to build an enabling environment within countries for LDN investment.

Management response: Accepted. The GM will continue analyzing the high level notes and national LDN TSP reports as well as other relevant feedback received from countries that are working towards LDN, with the aim to identify knowledge gaps faced by these countries. In response to the identified gaps, the Secretariat and the GM will develop knowledge products, within the limits of their available resources, for different purposes and target groups.

With regard to knowledge gaps concerning the identification, development and financing of transformative projects and programmes, the GM will focus its efforts on assisting countries in developing early-stage project/programme concept notes. This will involve mainly technical support, for which the GM has recently developed a checklist¹, and is also developing a practical guide that seek to provide additional operational guidance and ensure consistency and completeness in LDN implementation.

The GM will take stock of LDN implementation at all levels to identify and disseminate good practices. Together with the Secretariat, the GM will continue providing successful and innovative cases, practices and stories of LDN leverage online to facilitate cross-country learning. This “capitalization of knowledge” on LDN will be available as peer learning for all countries that have recently started, or are about to start, the work on LDN targets, so they can benefit from successful examples of the work already done by other countries, both within the same region and across regions.

Regarding the development of targeted outreach/awareness raising products for specific audiences, the GM will develop a number of thematically specific assessments and policy briefs on LDN. The GM will continue facilitating peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and targeted events at regional and global levels (including during the COP meetings).

Recommendation 2: The UNCCD Secretariat and the GM, in collaboration with IUCN and other key partners, should develop a strategy for responding to requests for capacity building and development support from countries that are working towards LDN. This strategy could include, for example:

- Guidance on how to undertake national LDN capacity gap analyses
- Guidance on tackling common capacity gaps
- Developing and maintaining a database of LDN capacity building and development options, covering (e.g.) training courses, formal education, direct inputs from (named) technical experts
- Developing and maintaining knowledge of funding sources for LDN capacity building and development

Management response: Accepted. LDN TSP already identified some key areas requiring enhanced capacity-building at country level, notably on assessing and monitoring land degradation and accessing funding for implementation. These will be the LDN capacity building focus areas for the UNCCD Secretariat and the GM.

For effective monitoring of LDN targets, there is a recognized need for expertise, tools and training to enhance national capacity to undertake quantitative assessments and corresponding mapping of degraded lands. Furthermore, the integration of LDN indicators in the national SDG framework requires better country level capacity to generate comparable national data. To address these challenges, the UNCCD Secretariat and the GM will continue working with the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), under

¹ <https://knowledge.unccd.int/knowledge-products-and-pillars/access-capacity-policy-support-technology-tools/checklist-land>

the framework of its GEO LDN initiative. This collaboration will seek to provide expertise, tools and training for the use of Earth Observation in LDN planning, implementation and monitoring, and to assist with the development of quality standards, data analytics and protocols for the indicators, with emphasis on bridging national to local scale.

The GM, in collaboration with its partners, will assist countries to develop country-level partnerships leading to the design and implementation of transformative projects. The GM will also continue to develop innovative finance approaches in support of LDN implementation.

Recommendation 3: The UNCCD Secretariat, the GM and IUCN, should undertake research into the integration of gender within LDN strategies and targets, with a view to producing guidance on how countries should mainstream gender within their national LDN efforts. Partners should also consider extending this work to explore the integration of livelihoods and other co-benefits within LDN strategies and targets.

Management response: Accepted. The UNCCD Secretariat, the GM and IUCN will analyse the integration of gender within selected countries' LDN strategies and targets, with the aim to identify practices and approaches that have worked, and also those that have not worked. This information will be used to further develop guidance on how to integrate gender considerations in the work on LDN, which is currently under preparation with UN Women and IUCN. Initiated in 2018, the UNCCD Secretariat, the GM and IUCN will continue to provide capacity building on gender at regional and national level and to provide technical guidance on including gender in LDN transformative projects. Further awareness building and use of the Gender Helpdesk will be promoted and other options to strengthen gender integration will be identified, drawing on IUCN's gender responsive programming policy that requires mainstreaming of gender equality in all program and project operations. Options for strengthening governance and livelihood actions in LDN response measures will also be identified.

Recommendation 4: Building on the momentum achieved through the TSP and the development of the LDN concept, the UNCCD Secretariat and the GM should identify practical options for closer working with the CBD and UNFCCC Secretariats, with a view to achieving stronger harmonisation across the three Conventions.

Management response: Accepted. The GM will continue identifying practical options and mechanisms to enhance synergies between the three Rio Conventions based on the LDN concept. This will include the support to countries to develop transformative projects and programmes addressing the objectives of all Rio conventions as well as exploring options to develop a Rio Convention Project Preparation Facility, which aims to support the development of transformative projects that address the objectives of all three Conventions.

The UNCCD Secretariat will continue collaboration with the secretariats of the other two Rio Conventions on the jointly use of some of the indicators used for monitoring LDN progress.

Recommendation 5: If the UNCCD Secretariat and the GM apply a similar centralised operating model for future projects, the underlying 'business standards' (particularly guidance on eligible expenditure) should be fixed in advance of implementation and should be clearly communicated to all participants prior to initiation of any work.

If the services of UNDP Country Offices are to be retained to support in-country administration, senior management within the UNCCD Secretariat should – as a matter of routine – provide formal written advance notice of the project to the senior management of each UNDP Country Office, with a view to building awareness and support for the project at a high level.

Management response: Accepted. For upcoming similar operations, the Secretariat and the GM will improve the existing business standards and ensure that they are clearly communicated to the participants. For any administrative support that will be requested from the UNDP Country Offices, a formal advanced notice will be sent as a standard practice to facilitate cooperation.