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#### 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: implications for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

**Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 and related target 15.3 which states: “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”, into the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

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#### Report by the Executive Secretary

##### *Summary*

By its decision 3/COP.12, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided that striving to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3 is a strong vehicle for driving implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), within the scope of the Convention, and requested the UNCCD secretariat and appropriate UNCCD bodies to take the initiative and invite other relevant agencies and stakeholders to seek cooperation to achieve the target. Furthermore, the same decision, the COP invited Parties to formulate voluntary targets to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) in accordance with their specific national circumstances and development priorities, and requested the secretariat and appropriate UNCCD bodies to develop guidance for formulating national LDN targets.

This document provides a summary of the efforts of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to support countries in the integration of SDG 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention. The document also outlines recommendations on future work priorities and collaborations for implementing and monitoring progress towards SDG target 15.3.

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## **I. Background**

1. By its decision 3/COP.12, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided that striving to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3 is a strong vehicle for driving implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and requested the UNCCD secretariat and appropriate UNCCD bodies to take the initiative and invite other relevant agencies and stakeholders to seek cooperation to achieve the target. By the same decision, the COP invited Parties to formulate voluntary targets to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) and to use the monitoring and evaluation approach adopted in decision 22/COP.11 to monitor, evaluate and communicate progress towards achieving the LDN target.

2. COP 13 is expected to adopt a new strategic framework of the Convention for 2018–2030. The strategic framework will contribute to: (i) achieving the objectives of the Convention and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular regarding SDG 15 and target 15.3 which states: “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” and other interrelated SDGs; (ii) improving the living conditions of affected populations; and (iii) enhancing ecosystems services.

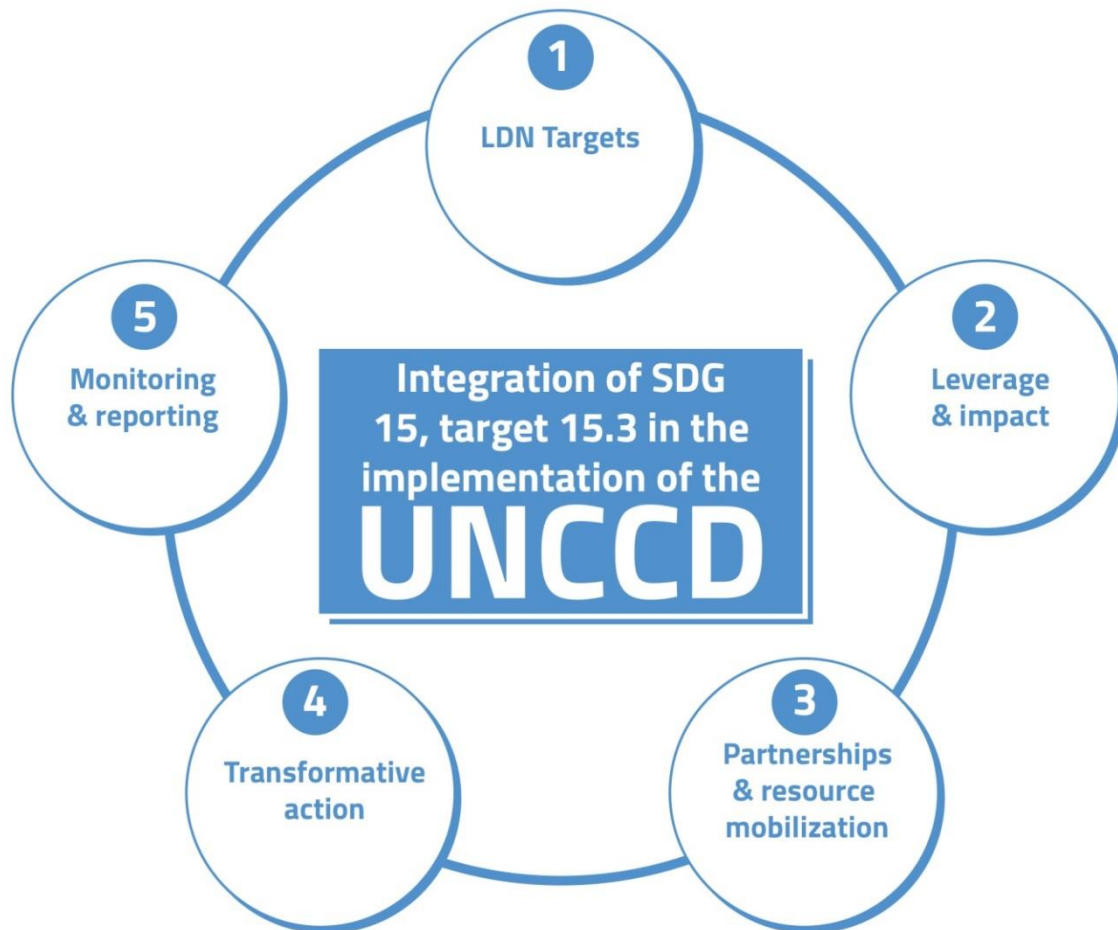
3. While COP 13 will decide on the strategic framework, Parties supported by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism have already been taking decisive action in starting to integrate SDG 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention. This document summarizes the main achievements of and support provided by the secretariat, the Global Mechanism and UNCCD bodies.

## **II. Elements for integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 and target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention**

4. This document has been structured according to five elements identified as essential for integrating SDG 15 and target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention.

5. These five elements summarize the essential areas of action required to integrate SDG 15 and target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention (see figure 1). They are: (1) LDN targets: setting targets and establishing the level of ambition; (2) leverage and impact: catalysing the multiple benefits that LDN provides from climate change to poverty reduction; (3) partnerships and resource mobilization: rationalizing engagement with partners, overcoming fragmentation, and systematically tapping into increasing finance opportunities, including climate finance; (4) transformative action: designing and implementing bold transformative LDN projects that deliver multiple benefits; and (5) monitoring and reporting: tracking progress towards achieving the LDN targets.

Figure 1  
**Five elements of integration**



### III. Land degradation neutrality targets

6. **Parties' commitment to set LDN targets:** following the invitation contained in decision 3/COP.12 to formulate national voluntary LDN targets, the majority of Parties (108 as at May 2017) have committed to set voluntary LDN targets and are advancing in the process of setting these targets and identifying policies and measures to achieve them.

7. **Support from the secretariat and the Global Mechanism:** responding to the request contained in decision 3/COP.12 to the secretariat and appropriate UNCCD bodies to develop guidance for formulating national LDN targets and initiatives, and facilitate the use of the UNCCD indicator framework as a contribution to the monitoring, evaluation and communication of progress towards the national LDN targets, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism in collaboration with the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) conducted the following activities:

(a) **Scientific conceptual framework for LDN:** the SPI developed a scientific conceptual framework for LDN. This conceptual framework is intended to provide a scientifically sound basis for planning, implementing and monitoring LDN for those Parties that choose to pursue an LDN target. The scientific conceptual framework for LDN was published in February 2017 in the form of a technical report<sup>1</sup> and a science-policy brief.<sup>2</sup> A summary of the main scientific findings related to the operationalization of LDN as well as conclusions and proposals for consideration by the Committee on Science and Technology at its thirteenth session are contained in document ICCD/COP(13)/CST/2;

(b) **LDN Target Setting Programme:** the Global Mechanism, in collaboration with the secretariat, established the LDN Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP) with the objective of supporting Parties that have committed to setting voluntary LDN targets in establishing national LDN baselines, setting voluntary LDN targets, and identifying associated measures to achieve LDN. The main activities conducted by this programme are as follows:

(i) **Building blocks of the LDN target setting:** based on the scientific guidance provided by the SPI, the lessons learned from the LDN pioneer countries, and the feedback received from countries and stakeholders, the Global Mechanism, in close collaboration with the secretariat, developed the building blocks for LDN target setting as a practical approach to put the evolving LDN concept into practice. This operational approach was summarized in the brochure *Achieving Land Degradation at the Country Level: Building Blocks for LDN Target Setting*,<sup>3</sup> which was widely communicated and disseminated to Parties, stakeholders and partners participating in the LDN TSP. It became the core framework guiding the process of setting targets in the LDN TSP participant countries;

(ii) **Default data for LDN baseline provided for monitoring LDN:** default data on the three indicators of the LDN monitoring framework was provided to all countries, and a growing number of countries have been provided with additional disaggregated data at watershed level as well as high resolution data for small island developing states;

(iii) **Capacity-building:** as part of the LDN TSP and using as a basis the LDN scientific conceptual framework and the building blocks approach, a set of workshops targeting the national teams leading the LDN target setting were conducted. Five inception workshops, one for each UNCCD region, were conducted and close to 100 national LDN workshops were supported by the LDN TSP country delivery teams. An additional regional workshop on advancing target setting ahead of COP 13 and identifying transformative LDN projects was conducted for Central and Eastern European countries. Continuous capacity-building through hands-on support to countries was provided through the LDN TSP country delivery teams;

(c) **Mainstreaming gender:** the secretariat provided assistance to Ethiopia – one of the 14 LDN TSP pilot countries – to broaden consultations at the national and

<sup>1</sup> 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. UNCCD. Bonn, Germany,

<[www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/LDN%20Scientific%20Conceptual%20Framework\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/LDN%20Scientific%20Conceptual%20Framework_FINAL.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> UNCCD/Science-Policy Interface. 2016. *Land in Balance: The Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality*. Science-Policy Brief 02. UNCCD., Bonn, Germany,

<[www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/18102016\\_Spi\\_pb\\_multipage\\_ENG\\_1.pdf](http://www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/18102016_Spi_pb_multipage_ENG_1.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> <[www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/18102016\\_LDN%20country%20level\\_ENG.pdf](http://www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/18102016_LDN%20country%20level_ENG.pdf)>.

subnational levels on its indicators, with specific attention to the two indicators on gender. Three women's groups in Burkina Faso, Chad and Senegal were also supported in response to issues that the women identified for sustainable land management (SLM) training. The results show that: (i) including gender-related indicators in LDN processes creates the opportunity to gather gender disaggregate data; (ii) livelihoods will be transformed when strategic action is taken to work with women on land rehabilitation and restoration initiatives and (iii) the sustainability of the rehabilitation work is more certain. Specific gender inequalities became apparent through the projects. Women's participation was still low at the meetings convened to address gender mainstreaming in LDN, which means that targeted consultations are vital. Whereas land degradation was not perceived to have an effect on women's employment in Ethiopia, the women's groups had requested training to market their products. The training further revealed gaps in technology use, valued adding skills and market knowledge, in particular, how to cost their goods. The results underscore the importance of the SPI's scientific conceptual framework for LDN on gender considerations for the design of preliminary assessments of LDN.

#### **IV. Leverage and impact: land degradation neutrality as a vehicle to tap opportunities**

8. LDN constitutes a vehicle to ensure greater access to financing for the implementation of the Convention (see document ICCD/CRIC(15)/5). Taking into consideration that action to achieve LDN as set out in SDG target 15.3 can deliver multiple benefits, LDN has the potential to become a vehicle to catalyse substantial amounts of sustainable development financing for the implementation of the Convention, including climate finance.

9. By its decision 3/COP.12, the COP invited Parties to explore options on how to integrate the voluntary LDN targets into their national action programmes (NAPs) as part of their overall discussion on the implementation of the SDGs and requested the Global Mechanism to make options available to Parties for the integration of national LDN targets and initiatives in their NAPs. In response to this request, the LDN TSP has supported a number of countries in creating a tailored LDN leverage plan, making use of a wide range of national tools and approaches, including NAPs.

10. An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of NAPs conducted in 2015<sup>4</sup> concluded that in cases where NAPs are not seen as the instrument to organize and bring to the fore governments' preferences, the solution may be to transform NAPs into a general statement of aims for which top-level support is secured. They would then constitute a policy framework which sets targets and describes how different projects contribute to meeting them. As such, NAPs would not compete with other initiatives, but provide the structure within which these other initiatives can reside. The point is not to dwell on the process, but to concentrate on delivery and hence on encouraging countries to "focus on four or five priorities and let them push these priorities through whichever mechanism is most efficient". Fundamental to this is clarity of goals, and to focus on top-level outcome and impact indicators.

11. Taking into consideration the results of the independent evaluation, the opportunities created by the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Bonn Challenge, as well as the early experience of the LDN target setting process, countries are encouraged to direct their efforts towards leveraging LDN as a strong vehicle to advance the implementation of the Convention. To serve this

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<sup>4</sup> <[www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2017-01/NAP%20evaluation\\_0.pdf](http://www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2017-01/NAP%20evaluation_0.pdf)>.

purpose, Parties might want to focus on achieving LDN by creating clear links between the land, climate and biodiversity agendas and their respective commitments, and to use whichever national planning mechanism is the most suitable and efficient in the country – whether it be a UNCCD NAP or a climate, biodiversity, restoration or other planning tool. Most important is to focus on implementation and on achieving respective targets, including LDN targets that are sustained by clear political will. Therefore, countries should decide whether and how to integrate the voluntary LDN targets into their NAPs as part of their overall discussion on the implementation of the SDGs. What counts most is to create leverage for LDN implementation and access to additional resources, including climate and restoration finance.

## V. Partnerships and resources mobilization

12. By its decision 3/COP.12, the COP requested the secretariat and appropriate UNCCD bodies to explore how they could further develop partnerships with other organizations to provide scientific and technical support to the Parties by, inter alia, developing a ‘user guide’ for implementing LDN at the country level. Furthermore, by the same decision, the COP requested the secretariat and the appropriate UNCCD bodies to improve the effectiveness of collaboration with the Rio conventions and other partners at the national and, as appropriate, subnational levels to support the implementation and monitoring of LDN targets and initiatives.

13. In response to this request the secretariat established an inter-agency advisory group on SDG indicator 15.3.1, which includes the other two Rio conventions (see document ICCD/COP(13)/6). Furthermore, as part of the efforts of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to increase global awareness and joint action between the three Rio conventions, the following activities were conducted: (i) participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings and workshops on national action plans; (ii) participation in the meetings of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice on topics such as ecosystem restoration and climate change adaptation; (iii) the establishment of national working groups, including the national focal points of CBD and UNFCCC; and (iv) participation in the Gender Partnership developing guidelines for mainstreaming gender in Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects and programmes.

14. In addition, a workshop jointly organized by the UNCCD and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on collaboration to support delivery of SDG target 15.3 was held in May 2017 in Rome, Italy. The objectives of the workshop were to assess and understand respective areas of technical expertise within the UNCCD and FAO to optimize support to countries for monitoring and reporting on the indicator for SDG 15.3, and agree on a shared vision and collaborative way forward. In this regard, it was agreed that the missions of the UNCCD and FAO are closely intertwined, and that the UNCCD, as the custodian of indicator 15.3.1, is committed to closely collaborating with its key partner FAO in order to upgrade the indicator from Tier III to Tier II status as soon as possible. Likewise, FAO has committed to help to implement and monitor SDG target 15.3 in select LDN-TSP countries. A road map for cooperation to achieve these goals was agreed to at this workshop.

15. In order to implement the LDN TSP, the Global Mechanism established knowledge, implementation and financial partnerships with several international and national partners. LDN default baseline data were made available through partnerships with the European Space Agency, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and the International Soil Reference and Information Centre. Implementation and/or financial partnerships were developed with the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the

GEF, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, FAO and the Soil Leadership Academy. Several bilateral partners have provided financial support to the LDN TSP, including the Governments of France, Germany, the Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Spain, Turkey, and Trinidad and Tobago.

16. Furthermore, by its decision 3/COP.12, the COP requested the Managing Director of the Global Mechanism, in consultation with the Executive Secretary, to develop options for increasing incentives and financial support, including assisting in the possible creation of an independent LDN fund, to be made available for the full realization of LDN initiatives. In response to this request, the development of the LDN Fund has advanced steadily since COP 12. Following an open tender selection process, Mirova, the responsible investment subsidiary of Natixis Global Asset Management, was selected as the LDN Fund structuring partner. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Global Mechanism and Mirova was established in December 2015, in line with the UNCCD business engagement strategy (see decision 6/COP.12).

17. Financial support for the development of the LDN Fund and implementation of the MoU was raised in the form of grants provided by the Governments of France, Luxembourg and Norway as well as by the Rockefeller Foundation. The LDN Fund team worked under the direct supervision of a joint Global Mechanism–Mirova Steering Committee and with the assistance of an advisory group comprising senior representatives of potential public investors in the Fund and experts in the area of LDN coming from governments, the private sector, academia, international non-governmental organizations and civil society. Among other topics, the advisory group provided guidance and support on the establishment of the LDN Fund and the development of environmental and social performance standards, including by seeking inputs through a public consultation process. In November 2016, the European Investment Bank announced that it has started a due diligence process towards a cornerstone investment into the LDN Fund. In addition to the European Investment Bank, several public and private investors expressed interest in capitalizing the Fund, and many of them are conducting their due diligence process at the time of writing, indicating that the launch of the LDN Fund and its first investments will take place in the coming months.

18. In order to increase financing for the Convention, the Global Mechanism has started its engagement with multilateral development banks and other funding sources of relevance for the implementation of the Convention. Among these activities, an engagement road map with the Green Climate Fund (GCF) was developed based on the outcomes of senior-level exchanges. Envisioned joint activities include fostering a common approach on climate and land use with the aim of promoting transformative land-based climate actions.

## **VI. Transformative action**

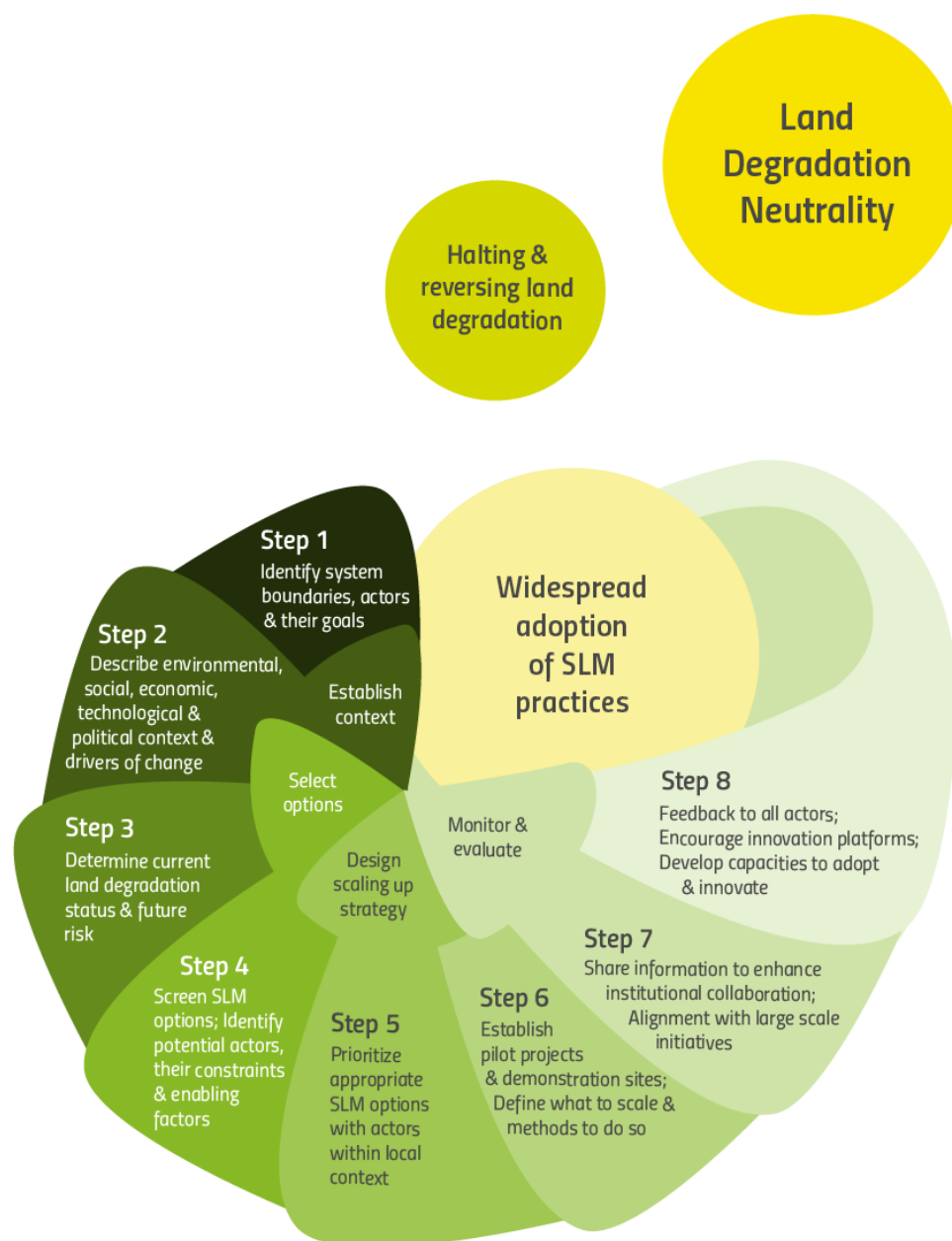
19. By its decision 3/COP.12, the COP requested the secretariat and appropriate UNCCD bodies, within the scope of the Convention, to develop options for scaling up and scaling out successful LDN initiatives and other SLM practices. In response to this request, and in partnership with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and their International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, the secretariat convened an expert workshop in Amman, Jordan, in April 2016 to develop a framework for scaling up and scaling out best practices in SLM. The results of the workshop<sup>5</sup> will contribute to the first edition of the Global Land Outlook. Figure 2 synthesizes the key steps for the scaling up and scaling out of SLM practices from the local to the national level and beyond.

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<sup>5</sup> <<https://mel.cgiar.org/reporting/download/hash/v9a0csjT>>.



Figure 2  
**Framework for scaling up sustainable land management best practices**



20. Scaling up and scaling out requires transformative projects that ideally contribute to LDN targets, deliver multiple benefits (including climate benefits and SDGs) and build on good practices with high social impact; enhance national capacities and leverage innovative finance, including the private sector. As part of the LDN TSP, the Global Mechanism is working with selected LDN pilot countries in mapping out opportunities for transformative projects. Going forward, the Global Mechanism, in collaboration with the secretariat and UNCCD bodies, will: (i) support countries in identifying transformative LDN project opportunities; (ii) scale up its advisory services to national entities in developing transformative LDN projects, including for GCF financing; (iii) seek partnerships with

international partners to support the implementation of transformative projects; and (iv) develop and promote a gender responsive approach in the identified LDN transformative projects and programmes.

## **VII. Monitoring and reporting**

21. In the scientific conceptual framework for LDN, the SPI recommends the use of the following three indicators (utilizing readily available metrics) to reflect the land-based ecosystem services the LDN target seeks to conserve, sustainably use and restore: (i) land cover (land cover change), (ii) land productivity (net primary production) and (iii) carbon stocks (soil organic carbon stocks). These indicators and associated metrics were selected from among the UNCCD progress indicators adopted in decision 22/COP.11. Monitoring the achievement of neutrality will quantify the balance between the area of gains (significant positive changes in LDN indicators, i.e., improvements) and area of losses (significant negative changes in LDN indicators, i.e., degradation) within each land type across the landscape. The three global LDN indicators are applied in a “one out, all out” approach: where if any of the indicators shows significant negative change, it is considered a loss, and conversely, if at least one indicator shows a positive trend and none shows a negative trend, it is considered a gain. Countries are encouraged to supplement the three global indicators with national indicators related to poverty, water, gender and governance not covered by the three global indicators. The three global indicators are also being considered for monitoring SDG 15.3 indicator 15.3.1 “Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area”.

## **VIII. Conclusions and recommendations**

22. **When considering the next steps for the integration of SDG 15 and target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention, the COP may wish to consider the following draft decision text at its thirteenth session:**

23. ***Recalling* the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the outcome document “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which includes SDG 15: “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”, and target 15.3: “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”,**

24. ***Also recalling* the report of the Intergovernmental Working Group contained in decision 3/COP.12 on the follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), specifically on the outcomes related to LDN,**

25. ***Acknowledging* that LDN, as an integral part of the UNCCD strategic framework of the Convention for 2018–2030, will contribute to achieving the objectives of the Convention and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda by improving the living conditions of affected populations and enhancing ecosystems services while providing global benefits,**

26. ***Recognizing* that while the secretariat is making a significant contribution to achieving LDN, the full implementation of SDG target 15.3 will require contributions from other bodies and agencies, and the secretariat should therefore continue to work cooperatively in a partnership towards that aim,**

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27. *Also recognizing* that the secretariat of the UNCCD has strategically positioned itself as the lead organization for desertification/land degradation and drought and has successfully taken the initiative and invited other relevant agencies and stakeholders, such as United Nations agencies, international organizations, financial institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector, to collaborate to achieve SDG target 15.3,
28. *Taking into consideration* the relevant decisions taken at COP 13,
29. *Invites* Parties who have not yet done so to:
- (a) Formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN in accordance with their specific national circumstances and development priorities;
  - (b) Use LDN as a lens to foster coherence among national policies, actions and commitments; to develop transformative projects creating multiple benefits; and to tap into increasing financing opportunities, combining public and private, national and international sustainable development resources, including climate finance;
  - (c) Ensure that the LDN targets and the activities to achieve these targets are directly linked to the national SDG agenda and creates leverage and synergies with the country's climate and biodiversity agendas, ideally through joint programming of the three Rio conventions;
  - (d) Use the monitoring and evaluation approach adopted in decision 22/COP.11, including the progress indicators as listed in the annex to that decision, where reliable data is available pursuant to paragraph 7 of that decision and taking into consideration national circumstances and, as needed, add additional indicators, such as on gender, to monitor, evaluate and communicate progress towards achieving the LDN target;
30. *Invites* all Parties to scale up financing for the achievement of LDN in reference to decision X/COP.13 on financing for the implementation of the Convention;
31. *Requests* the secretariat, the Global Mechanism and appropriate UNCCD bodies to:
- (a) Continue to develop LDN partnerships with other organizations to provide scientific and technical support to Parties by, inter alia, developing guidance for leveraging LDN, identifying projects opportunities and connecting respective partners for further development of transformative LDN projects and providing advisory support for national accredited institutions to the climate finance and other sustainable development finance institutions;
  - (b) Improve the effectiveness of collaboration with the other Rio conventions and other partners at the national and, as appropriate, subnational levels to support the implementation and monitoring of LDN targets and initiatives;
32. *Also requests* the Executive Secretary to report to the COP at its fourteenth session on the implementation of this decision.
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