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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 into the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and land degradation neutrality

Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and land degradation neutrality

Report by the Executive Secretary

Summary

By 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. The COP 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 its decision 3/COP.13, the COP requested the secretariat, the Global Mechanism (GM) and appropriate UNCCD bodies, including the Science-Policy Interface, within their respective mandates, to: (1) continue to develop partnerships to support the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality, and (2) contribute to the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development with the aim of highlighting countries' progress towards the implementation of the Convention.

This document provides a summary of the efforts of the secretariat and the GM to support countries in the integration of SDG 15 and related target 15.3 in implementing the Convention as well as recommendations on future work priorities in this regard.

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I. Background

1. By decision 3/COP.12, the Conference of the Parties (COP) reaffirmed 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 take the initiative and invite other relevant agencies and stakeholders to seek cooperation to achieve the target. In decision 3/COP.13, 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. In decision 7/COP.13, the COP adopted the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework with a vision of a future that avoids, minimizes, and reverses desertification/land degradation and mitigates the effects of drought in affected areas at all levels and strives to achieve a land degradation-neutral world consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, within the scope of the Convention. In accordance with the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and by leveraging partnerships to support efforts to achieve LDN, Parties have taken decisive action to integrate SDG 15 and related target 15.3 in implementing the Convention. This document provides a summary of the efforts of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) to support countries as well as recommendations on future work priorities in this regard.

II. Partnerships to support the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality

A. Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme

3. To support countries in defining SDG target 15.3 at the national level, the GM and the secretariat, in collaboration with 18 international partners,¹ delivered comprehensive support to countries that committed to setting their national voluntary LDN targets. As of May 2019, 122 countries are participating in the LDN Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP). According to an independent terminal evaluation of the LDN TSP, this support was successful, in part, due to the involvement of a wide variety of institutions and countries, and the extensive breadth of technical and financial partners that helped raise the profile and understanding of LDN and the UNCCD.²

B. Land degradation neutrality transformative projects and programmes

4. In order to contribute to the achievement of SDG target 15.3, as specified in the LDN targets adopted by country Parties, the LDN transformative projects and programmes (LDN TPP) supported country Parties in translating the technical and planning work undertaken as part of LDN target setting into the development of LDN implementation activities on the ground. Furthermore, the GM and the secretariat, together with experts serving on the Science-Policy Interface, developed a voluntary checklist for LDN TPP³ that aims to assist country-level project developers and their technical and financial partners in designing effective and gender-responsive transformative projects and programmes.

¹ France, Germany, Luxembourg, Republic of Korea, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Venezuela, the European Space Agency, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Global Environment Facility, International Soil Reference and Information Centre – World Soil Information, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Soil Leadership Academy, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme and World Resources Institute.

² <<https://www.unccd.int/about-us/evaluation-office>>.

³ <<https://www.thegef.org/documents/checklist-land-degradation-neutrality-transformative-projects-and-programmes-draft>>.

5. Consistent with SDG 5 on gender and the implementation of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan (GAP) adopted in decision 9/COP.10, the GM has supported countries in designing effective and gender responsive LDN TPP. In this regard, the GM has established partnerships with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to assist countries in designing gender-responsive LDN TPP proposals. As of May 2019, the GM, together with UN Women and the IUCN, has mainstreamed gender responsiveness in various LDN implementation activities by:

(a) Reviewing eight LDN TPP proposals through the gender help desk to help ensure that they meet the gender requirements of funding sources, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund; and

(b) Organizing three transformative projects and programmes capacity-building workshops in St. Lucia, the Philippines and Zambia.

6. More than 100 participants, including civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's farming groups, benefitted from these workshops focused on the inclusion of a gender perspective in the LDN project cycle. Information on partnerships and capacity-building aimed at promoting gender-responsive approaches in line with the GAP can be found in ICCD/COP(14)/5 and ICCD/CRIC(18)/8.

C. Land Degradation Neutrality Fund

7. In response to decision 3/COP.12, which calls on the GM to support the "creation of an independent LDN Fund", the GM has forged a strong collaboration with a wide range of public, philanthropic and private partners with the aim of catalysing private capital to achieve LDN and thereby address unmet financing needs. In the development and operationalization of the LDN Fund, the GM partnered with the governments of Luxembourg, France, and Norway, as well as the Rockefeller Foundation which supported the feasibility studies and the initial design of the Fund. These partners also supported the initial structuring and legal foundation of the Fund, and the process of identifying and selecting the private sector fund manager, Mirova, through a competitive process.

8. The concept of the LDN Fund, i.e. leveraging public resources to catalyse private investment in support of LDN and other sustainable land management (SLM) activities, is proving to be successful. The Fund has demonstrated the strong viability of bringing impact investors into the LDN process by utilizing financial contributions from public actors. The LDN Fund has also contributed to inspiring other innovative initiatives, such as the Seed Capital Assistance Facility,⁴ supported by the GEF, United Nations Foundation, United Kingdom and Germany, which seeks to mobilize private investment funds for sustainable activities, including forest and landscape restoration projects.

D. Partnerships with multilateral funding and technical partners

9. The GM has been actively engaging multilateral funding and technical entities in capacity-building events to disseminate among their respective staff some of the technical aspects of LDN, as an accelerator for the SDGs in general and SDG target 15.3 in particular; and to facilitate exchanges with UNCCD national focal points and other stakeholders.

10. The GM has also been collaborating closely with the secretariat of the GEF in support of UNCCD implementation activities, as well as promoting synergies with other Rio Conventions with the aim of fostering co-benefits contributing to the achievement of national priorities within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the upcoming United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030.

⁴ <<https://www.scaf-energy.org/home>>.

E. The Changwon Initiative and Greening Drylands Partnership

11. Launched at the tenth session of the COP, the Changwon Initiative has been contributing to various efforts to assist with LDN implementation. The dominant thread connecting much of the Initiative's support was the extensive work to develop and test the concept of LDN. For example, the Changwon Initiative supported the LDN pilot project and Greening Drylands Partnership, which ultimately helped to prepare the technical, scientific and political ground for the adoption of LDN. The Initiative's support for the LDN TSP and LDN TPP has facilitated partnership building and the further mainstreaming of LDN and land issues in the global environmental agenda and the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework.

12. The Greening Drylands Partnership, a programme of the Changwon Initiative, is a trilateral partnership between the UNCCD, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Republic of Korea. The three partners cooperate on issues related to combatting desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD); forest and ecosystem restoration in degraded lands, biodiversity conservation; and climate change mitigation and adaptation. By creating an enabling environment, the Greening Drylands Partnership aims to help enhance the livelihoods of affected communities; improve the conditions of the affected ecosystems; protect biodiversity; and further advance efforts in the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

13. Since 2011, the Greening Drylands Partnership has supported 14 projects in testing and fulfilling national voluntary LDN commitments in collaboration with relevant partners, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, governments, CSOs and local communities. Field level activities include capacity development for the rehabilitation and restoration of degraded ecosystems, such as drylands, rangelands, forest, peatlands, and wetlands, through SLM measures such as agroforestry and tree planting.

III. Contributions to the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

14. The secretariat organized a session on land and soil and participated in the Expert Group Meeting on SDG 15 and its role in advancing sustainable development through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda held in New York in May 2019. The session highlighted the enhanced role of the UNCCD and the international community in helping countries to take ownership of their SDG 15 targets. One example cited was the UNCCD's unique capacity-building programme on LDN, which has supported many countries in national target setting as well as the implementation and monitoring of SDG target 15.3. The outcomes of this session were reflected in the 2018 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) Background Note – Review of progress towards achieving SDG 15 – issues submitted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with all partners.⁵ In addition, the secretariat submitted the UNCCD's contribution to the 2018 HLPF.⁶

15. The secretariat also submitted storylines and data that were included in the Report of the Secretary General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals⁷ and the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018.⁸

16. The secretariat, through its regional coordination units, reached out and provided inputs to the countries participating in the Voluntary National Reviews of the 2018 HLPF. The secretariat also contributed substantively to the background paper on the sub-theme, "Life on land", for the fourth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, held in preparation for the 2018 HLPF on sustainable development.

⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/200087.8_Formatted_Background_NoteSDG_15.pdf>.

⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17997UNCCD_contribution_to_HLPF_2018_FINAL.pdf>.

⁷ <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2018/secretary-general-sdg-report-2018--EN.pdf>>.

⁸ <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2018/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2018-EN.pdf>>.

17. The secretariat organized and participated in various events during the 2018 HLPF including: a side event on “Big space data and the SDGs”, organized by the Australian Government; the pre-release of the publication entitled, “A Better World”, which focused on SDG 15 and target 15.3;⁹ a side event on enhancing resilience hosted by the United Kingdom Government; the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by the UNCCD and the International Solar Alliance to highlight the crucial role of affordable, reliable and sustainable energy for sound land management and inclusive economic growth; the organization of an event on drought with the participation of the Group of Friends of DLDD, hosted by the Canadian Government; and a Ministerial Side Event on the Initiative on Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S) in Africa, hosted by Senegal and Morocco with the participation of Ministers from Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, The Gambia, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal and the Netherlands and the Permanent Representatives of France, Nigeria, Zambia and Turkey, the Directorate-General for Environment of the European Commission and Italy and representatives of The World Bank, the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

18. When considering the next steps for the further integration of SDG 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN targets, it is recognized that the LDN approach and related activities contribute to the implementation of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by improving the living conditions and resilience of affected populations and ecosystem services while providing local, national, regional and global benefits.

19. When projects and programmes are well-designed and appropriately-funded, LDN implementation can deliver multiple benefits with the potential to act as an accelerator for achieving, and an integrator for linking, multiple SDGs as well as a catalyst for attracting sustainable development and climate finance to implement the Convention.

20. Diverse partnerships and collaborations at all levels are required to make a significant contribution to combating DLDD, as well as achieving LDN and the full implementation of SDG target 15.3.

21. As the lead organization addressing desertification/land degradation and drought, the UNCCD has taken the initiative and invited other relevant agencies and stakeholders, such as United Nations agencies, international organizations, financial institutions, CSOs and the private sector, to collaborate to achieve SDG target 15.3; and now to help formulate activities and programmes with partners as part of the upcoming United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030.

22. Accordingly, the COP may wish to consider the following at its fourteenth session:

(a) Reaffirming the utility of the monitoring and evaluation approach for all Parties as adopted in decision 7/COP.13, including the progress indicators therein, and, as needed, the use of additional indicators to monitor, evaluate and communicate progress towards achieving SDG target 15.3, inter alia, by reporting on SDG indicator 15.3.1 within the SDG indicator framework;

(b) Fostering national-level synergies among the Rio conventions, including the joint programming of activities at the national level and with the full engagement of relevant stakeholders;

(c) Strengthening national-level coordination and cooperation for the mainstreaming of SDG target 15.3 into national policy and regulatory frameworks, based on integrated land use planning and a landscape approach, to guide the implementation of transformative projects and programmes to combat DLDD and sand and dust storms to deliver multiple benefits to society;

⁹ <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/better-world-actions-and-commitments-sustainable-development-goals>>.

(d) Continuing to develop partnerships that support the implementation of the Convention and the scaling up of progress towards achieving LDN, taking note of, as appropriate, the Group on Earth Observations LDN Initiative, the United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, the New Urban Agenda, the Changwon and Ankara Initiatives, and other complementary initiatives, to provide scientific and technical support to the Parties by, inter alia: (i) developing guidance and practical tools, (ii) identifying project opportunities and connecting respective partners for resource mobilization, (iii) promoting gender-responsive approaches, and (iv) providing support for actors and institutions nationally accredited to the climate and sustainable development finance institutions;

(e) Also continuing to contribute to the HLPF on Sustainable Development by engaging with and, as appropriate, facilitating participation in regional meetings and other activities leading up to the HLPF on Sustainable Development, and providing inputs, including a potential submission in consultation with the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties, with the aim of highlighting countries' progress towards the implementation of the Convention and, as appropriate, the achievement of their voluntary LDN targets.
