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#### Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels

#### Update on the implementation of the voluntary land degradation neutrality targets and related implementation efforts

## Update on the implementation of the voluntary land degradation neutrality targets and related implementation efforts

### Report by the Global Mechanism

#### *Summary*

Decisions 3/COP.14 and 13/COP.14 requested the Global Mechanism (GM) and the secretariat, in collaboration with relevant international partners, to continue supporting the process of voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) target-setting and continue sharing relevant knowledge and lessons learned. Additionally, decision 12/COP.14 requested the secretariat to include regular stocktaking of the voluntary target-setting exercise in official documentation prepared for intersessional sessions of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

In addition, Parties requested the secretariat and the GM to support country-level activities towards the implementation of voluntary LDN targets, including through supporting LDN transformative projects and programmes (TPPs) (see decision 13/COP.14) and drought projects related to anthropogenic sand and dust storms source mitigation (see decision 25/COP.14). Decision 2/COP.14 requested the secretariat, the GM and other appropriate UNCCD institutions and bodies to continue supporting capacity-building efforts with particular focus on LDN monitoring and the effective development of LDN TPPs.

In line with these requests, this document provides an update on the status of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme and the progress made to support country Parties in the development of TPPs in the pursuit of LDN implementation.

Finally, the report provides conclusions and recommendations for the consideration of Parties at the nineteenth session of the CRIC.



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## **I. Introduction: Background on the setting and implementation of land degradation neutrality targets**

### **A. Sustainable Development Goals and land degradation neutrality within the Convention**

1. In September 2015, the global community agreed on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. Goal 15 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”. SDG target 15.3 aims 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”.

2. At the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in October 2015, Parties endorsed SDG target 15.3, which includes the concept of land degradation neutrality (LDN), as a strong vehicle for driving implementation of the Convention (decision 3/COP.12). In the same decision, the Conference of the Parties (COP) also requested the secretariat and appropriate UNCCD bodies to develop guidance for formulating voluntary national LDN targets and related initiatives. In response, the Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD established the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP) in collaboration with the UNCCD secretariat.

3. After COP 12, the secretariat assumed, as an observer to the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators, the role of custodian agency for SDG indicator 15.3.1 (i.e. the proportion of land that is degraded over the total land area), which was adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2017. The secretariat has taken the lead in monitoring progress towards achieving SDG target 15.3 in close synergy with the UNCCD reporting process. It produced, in consultation with the members of the Inter-Agency Advisory Group on SDG Indicator 15.3.1,<sup>1</sup> a metadata description<sup>2</sup> and good practice guidance<sup>3</sup> related to this indicator and coherent with the approach adopted in decision 22/COP.11.

4. In September 2017, the COP, at its thirteenth session, highlighted the importance of the LDN target-setting and implementation processes for the UNCCD by:

(a) Inviting Parties to formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN in accordance with their specific national circumstances and development priorities (decision 2/COP.13) and ensure that LDN targets and the activities to achieve these targets are directly linked to their national SDG agendas and create leverage and synergies with their countries’ climate and biodiversity agendas (decision 3/COP.13);

(b) Encouraging Parties to develop transformative projects and programmes (TPPs) to achieve national voluntary LDN targets and advance the implementation of the Convention in an effort to move from pilot projects and the proliferation of small projects to increasing scale and impact; and requesting the Managing Director of the GM to scale up GM support

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Statistics Division.

<sup>2</sup> <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-15-03-01.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> <[https://prais.unccd.int/sites/default/files/helper\\_documents/4-GPG\\_15.3.1\\_EN.pdf](https://prais.unccd.int/sites/default/files/helper_documents/4-GPG_15.3.1_EN.pdf)>.

to Parties in their efforts to develop and implement TPPs in collaboration with international partners (decision 14/COP.13);

(c) Endorsing the Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN summarized in document ICCD/COP(13)/CST/2 and developed by the Science-Policy Interface (SPI); and calling upon Parties pursuing LDN to consider such guidance, taking national circumstances<sup>4</sup> into account (decision 18/COP.13).

## **B. Decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties at its fourteenth session**

5. In September 2019, the COP, at its fourteenth session, provided additional guidance on the importance of the LDN process to the UNCCD through various decisions (see annex I), inviting Parties that have committed to voluntary LDN targets to implement measures to accelerate their achievement by strengthening national-level coordination and cooperation based on, inter alia, integrated land-use planning, to guide the implementation of TPPs (decision 3/COP.14). The LDN target-setting process was acknowledged as providing an opportunity for countries to promote synergies among the Rio conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements and policy coherence across multiple sectors, particularly as an accelerator for national-level achievement of the SDGs (decision 12/COP.14). Parties were also invited to identify relevant case studies on the implementation of LDN, which can be collated into a synthesis report by the secretariat in collaboration with the Global Mechanism for consideration by the COP at its fifteenth session (decision 13/COP.14).

6. The secretariat, the Global Mechanism and appropriate UNCCD bodies were respectively requested to (a) develop the LDN TSP and support Parties in implementing and periodically monitoring LDN TSP progress, and to continue promoting synergies and knowledge-sharing among Parties participating in the LDN TSP (decision 3/COP.14); (b) include regular stocktaking of the voluntary target-setting exercise in official documentation prepared for intersessional sessions of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) (decision 12/COP.14); and (c) in collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and relevant international partners, continue supporting the process of voluntary LDN target-setting, and also continue sharing relevant knowledge and lessons learned (decision 13/COP.14).

7. The secretariat and the Global Mechanism, within their respective mandates, were requested to support LDN TPPs and facilitate the mobilization of adequate financial resources from all sources of funding (decision 13/COP.14) by engaging with multilateral development banks and other relevant funding institutions, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF), to facilitate country Parties' access to funding in order to enhance national level synergies between addressing desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), climate change mitigation and adaptation (decision 13/COP.14); and financing options related to anthropogenic sand and dust storms source mitigation (decision 25/COP.14).

8. The secretariat, the Global Mechanism and other appropriate UNCCD institutions and bodies, including the SPI, were requested, acting within their respective mandates, subject to the availability of resources, to continue supporting capacity-building efforts, in collaboration with relevant partners, to facilitate the achievement of LDN, with particular focus on land degradation neutrality monitoring and the effective development of LDN TPPs (decision 2/COP.14).

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<sup>4</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/scientific-conceptual-framework-land-degradation-neutrality-report-science-policy>>.

9. Parties, were encouraged, as appropriate, and in particular affected developing country Parties, to develop and implement specific capacity-building programmes to facilitate a more efficacious implementation of the Convention, in particular on the themes of gender-sensitive and transformative approaches, especially, but not limited to, land degradation neutrality (decision 2/COP.14). This decision is reported on in document ICCD/CRIC(19)/5 on the follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Gender, Drought Initiative and Land Tenure.

## **II. Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme: Evaluation, knowledge-sharing, and update on progress**

### **A. Outcomes of independent evaluation**

10. Following the interim report on the LDN TSP presented in 2016 at the fifteenth session of the CRIC (document ICCD/CRIC(15)/3) and the subsequent comprehensive report presented in 2019 at CRIC 17 (document ICCD/CRIC(17)/3), and as reported in documents ICCD/COP(14)/12 and ICCD/CRIC(18)/7, the UNCCD Evaluation Office commissioned an independent evaluation of the LDN TSP, which concluded in April 2019 with the publication of its terminal evaluation report.<sup>5</sup>

11. This evaluation assessed the performance of the programme against the criteria of: (i) relevance; (ii) efficiency; (iii) effectiveness; (iv) progress to impact; (v) sustainability; and (vi) a cross-cutting criterion looking at participation and the extent to which the project integrated gender considerations.

12. Key conclusions of the above-mentioned evaluation include:

(a) The LDN TSP was highly relevant to the needs of participating countries and the priorities of the project partners. The number of countries involved, the variety of institutions within those countries, and the breadth of technical and financial partners that supported delivery also helped to raise the profile and understanding of LDN and the UNCCD;

(b) The LDN TSP was a cost-efficient and time-efficient process, with rapid delivery achieved through a combination of a well-structured, easily replicated process and centralized operating model. Particularly noteworthy were the significant efficiencies gained through the high volume of co-financing mobilized, both cash and in kind;

(c) The LDN TSP's relevance and efficiency in turn supported effective delivery: most project outputs and outcomes were achieved, with the number of participating countries greatly exceeding original projections. Especially effective was the work to deliver the core outputs of establishing national baselines and defining national LDN targets. However, some aspects could have been more effective, such as the limited work that was undertaken on knowledge-sharing (including communication and outreach efforts and the facilitation of peer-to-peer learning);

(d) A key output of the LDN TSP – the establishment of national working groups – helped to build ownership of the process and ensured relatively broad participation, albeit with considerable variation across countries. The gender aspects of the LDN TSP were not fully incorporated into the initial GEF Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Project design, but this gap was addressed as part of follow-up work to effectively integrate gender in the implementation of the LDN targets and measures; and

<sup>5</sup> Available at <<https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2019-04/LDNTSP-EvalReport%20final.pdf>>.

(e) Crucially, the whole process laid critical foundations for reaching the long-term objective of achieving LDN. Within most participating countries, the GEF project mentioned above helped to generate considerable interest and momentum around LDN. But the potential loss of this initial momentum was identified as the primary risk to the GEF project's sustainability and long-term impact. The most important next step towards the impact and sustainability identified was the development of project concept notes for transformative projects and securing investment for their delivery. Building political commitment, raising broader awareness of LDN, and continuous capacity-building and development were also pinpointed as crucial factors.

13. As a consequence of showcasing LDN targets and the success of the LDN TSP, there has been an increasing demand to continuously analyse the national LDN targets in order to determine the total sum of hectares of land that have been targeted for restoration through the LDN target-setting process globally. However, as the LDN target-setting process was nationally driven, it has been noted that countries used different approaches as well as differing units of measurements when setting their national LDN targets.

14. The limited number of countries that used national data to set the LDN baseline in the context of the LDN TSP demonstrates a general lack of national data, especially on land productivity and soil organic carbon. While global data sources provide a viable alternative in the absence of other suitable national datasets, the development of harmonized/standardized national data for the quantitative mapping of land cover, land productivity and soil carbon content provides the best basis for the assessment and monitoring of land degradation, also allowing the capture of drivers of change that are important within a specific country. This can be supported through the use of a tool such as Trends.Earth<sup>6</sup> that puts countries in a position to produce their own country estimates based on country data and nationally determined assumptions, while employing the standardized methodologies documented in the Good Practice Guidance for SDG Indicator 15.3.1.

15. Furthermore, the explicit integration of LDN targets and measures in national policy frameworks, including in (sub)national land-use planning, is still not well documented in many participating countries.

## **B. Progress on knowledge-sharing**

16. As participating countries successfully complete their LDN target-setting process, comprehensive national LDN reports (as well as high-level LDN notes for countries where the government officially adopts their LDN commitments) are published under a dedicated section on LDN targets in the respective country-specific webpages on the UNCCD Knowledge Hub<sup>7</sup> as a standard LDN TSP knowledge management practice. As of 15 October 2020, a total of 93 LDN national reports and 59 high-level LDN notes were publicly available, and additional ones are being uploaded on an ongoing basis as countries finalize and approve these key reference documents.

17. Addressing some of the key conclusions of the above-mentioned evaluation (see paragraph 10) and in order to capitalize on the wealth of information generated through the successful completion of the voluntary LDN target-setting processes in a majority of participating countries under the LDN TSP, the GM, in collaboration with relevant partner agencies, engaged in the production of a comprehensive series of communication and knowledge-sharing products.

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<sup>6</sup> <<http://trends.earth/docs/en/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Accessible through <<https://knowledge.unccd.int/home/country-information/countries-with-voluntary-ldn-targets>>.

18. These products analyse the outcomes of the LDN TSP from several key thematic perspectives, showcasing how the LDN targets and associated measures generate multiple benefits and contribute to key SDGs, as well as to relevant international process such as those under the Bonn Challenge and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), among other processes. They also highlight how LDN can be an effective tool to achieve sustainable development in vulnerable countries such as small island developing States. The list of publications produced by 15 October 2020 includes:

- (a) Reviving Land and Restoring Landscapes: Policy convergence between forest landscape restoration and land degradation neutrality,<sup>8</sup> contributed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN);
- (b) Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting: Initial findings and lessons learned,<sup>9</sup> contributed by the GM;
- (c) Land Degradation Neutrality Interventions to Foster Gender Equality,<sup>10</sup> contributed by the GM, IUCN, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women);
- (d) Land Degradation, Poverty and Inequality,<sup>11</sup> contributed by Conservation International, the German Development Institute and the GM;
- (e) Vulnerability to Food Insecurity in Mountain Regions: Land Degradation and Other Stressors,<sup>12</sup> contributed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Mountain Partnership and the GM;
- (f) Land Degradation Neutrality for Biodiversity Conservation. Briefing Note,<sup>13</sup> contributed by the CBD, GEF and the GM;
- (g) Land Degradation Neutrality for Biodiversity Conservation: How healthy land safeguards nature. Technical Report,<sup>14</sup> contributed by the CBD, GEF and the GM;
- (h) Land Degradation Neutrality for Water Security and Combatting Drought. Briefing Note,<sup>15</sup> contributed by the FAO, GM and Wageningen University and Research;
- (i) Land Degradation Neutrality in Small Island Developing States. Technical Report,<sup>16</sup> contributed by the FAO, GM, Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), the Partnership Initiative on Sustainable Land Management (PISLM) and the Pacific Community (SPC);

<sup>8</sup> <<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2019-028-En.pdf>>.

<sup>9</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-target-setting-initial-findings-and-lessons-learned>>.

<sup>10</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-interventions-foster-gender-equality>>.

<sup>11</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-poverty-and-inequality>>.

<sup>12</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/vulnerability-food-insecurity-mountain-regions-land-degradation-and-other-stressors>>.

<sup>13</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-biodiversity-conservation-briefing-note>>.

<sup>14</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-biodiversity-conservation-how-healthy-land-safeguards>>.

<sup>15</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-water-security-and-combatting-drought-briefing-note>>.

<sup>16</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-small-island-developing-statestechnical-report>>.

(j) Land Degradation Neutrality in Small Island Developing States. Briefing Note,<sup>17</sup> contributed by the FAO, GM, IOC, PISLM and SPC.

19. In addition to the knowledge and communication products mentioned above, PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency developed a database on global restoration commitments and related analysis.<sup>18</sup> The database was developed within the PBL Global Land Outlook project, which works at the request of the UNCCD secretariat in support of the goals of the Convention and of the Global Land Outlooks 1 and 2 in particular. The database covers all current commitments by countries on the restoration and sustainable use of land and terrestrial ecosystems that are available through nationally submitted plans under the three Rio conventions and under the Bonn Challenge and Bonn Challenge-related initiatives, and that are quantifiable in hectares with a clear baseline. The database only includes the commitments by countries that are new and additional, as far as could be discerned from the national plans/reports. The database does not track implementation or cover the areas that have already been restored.

20. In order to further facilitate public outreach and easy access to these LDN knowledge products, during 2020 the GM and the secretariat of the UNCCD continuously updated the LDN section on the UNCCD Knowledge Hub<sup>19</sup> and promoted achievements on UNCCD social media.

### C. Update on progress

21. Following the guidance provided by country Parties at COP 14, the GM and the secretariat of the UNCCD, in collaboration with 18 international partners,<sup>20</sup> continued supporting voluntary LDN target-setting in those country Parties that remained engaged in this process, as well as additional countries that requested support, bringing the total number of participating countries in the TSP to 124 as of 15 October 2020 (see annex I).

22. Out of these participating countries, and using as a basis comprehensive LDN baseline assessments incorporating the best available international and national data on LDN indicators, as of 15 October 2020, a total of 102 countries have set and technically validated their voluntary LDN targets and associated measures, and 97 countries have produced final national LDN reports. Of these final reports, 93 are available on the UNCCD Knowledge Hub. A total of 66 countries have officially adopted their LDN targets and delivered a high-level LDN note signed at the highest possible level by a minister, inter-ministerial body, cabinet council or the Head of State, and 59 of these are publicly available on the UNCCD Knowledge Hub.

23. As one of the key findings of the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency's analysis on global restoration commitments mentioned above, it is important to highlight that through the effective implementation of the LDN TSP and the voluntary LDN targets defined in this context by UNCCD country Parties, countries committed to restoring an estimated total of 450 million hectares of degraded lands, in addition to the restoration of about 250 million hectares planned in the context of the nationally determined contributions

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<sup>17</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-small-island-developing-states-briefing-note>>.

<sup>18</sup> Available at <<https://www.pbl.nl/en/publications/goals-and-commitments-for-the-restoration-decade>>.

<sup>19</sup> <<https://knowledge.unccd.int/topics/land-degradation-neutrality>>.

<sup>20</sup> France, Germany, Luxembourg, Republic of Korea, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), European Space Agency, FAO, GEF, International Soil Reference and Information Centre – World Soil Information, IUCN, Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Soil Leadership Academy, UNDP, United Nations Environment Programme and World Resources Institute.



(NDCs) under the UNFCCC, and some 90 million hectares included in the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans under the CBD.

### **III. Land degradation neutrality transformative projects and programmes: objectives, Global Mechanism support and open call, knowledge-sharing, and update on progress**

#### **A. Objectives**

24. The LDN TPP workstream aims at assisting country Parties in translating the voluntary LDN targets and associated measures defined during the LDN TSP into concrete actions on the ground through the development of gender-responsive and transformative projects and programmes. Country Parties have emphasized in particular the need for support during the early stages of project preparation to turn project idea notes into high quality project concept notes that can leverage financing, including from multilateral development banks and other relevant funding institutions, like the GCF and GEF.

25. At the early stage of the project cycle, where limited sources of funding are available, it is critical to conceptualize projects and programmes and engage national and international technical and financial partners that can support project preparation, financing and implementation.

26. The support provided by the GM to country Parties contributes to the design and implementation of gender-responsive LDN TPPs through sustainable and inclusive interventions at scale (e.g. in landscapes), while featuring innovation in terms of locally adapted technology and practices, financing mechanisms (e.g. blended finance) and measures to reverse land degradation trends and biodiversity loss and adapt to and mitigate climate change.

#### **B. Global Mechanism support and open call**

27. An initial phase of the LDN TPP workstream was implemented on a case-by-case basis in response to country demands from 2018–2019. The GM supported countries in developing LDN TPP in five areas:

- (a) Technical support in developing a LDN TPP concept note, taking into account:
  - (i) The principles of the Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN by applying the LDN TPP checklist,<sup>21</sup> which was developed by the GM and the secretariat and scientifically reviewed by the SPI; and
  - (ii) The LDN TPP opportunities identified in the context of the LDN TSP;
- (b) Facilitating dialogue with national and international stakeholders, including implementing partners, accredited entities and financing partners;
- (c) Mainstreaming gender in LDN TPPs through a partnership with UN Women and IUCN;
- (d) Supporting the development of full project/programme proposals once the concept note has been approved, based on specific requests on an ad hoc basis; and

<sup>21</sup> <<https://knowledge.unccd.int/checklistLDNTPP>>.

(e) Establishing strong synergies with UNCCD flagship initiatives such as the Sustainability, Stability, Security (3S Initiative)<sup>22</sup> in jointly preparing project/programme concept notes and proposals to support countries involved.

28. Based on experiences accumulated and relevant tools developed through the LDN TPP initial phase and in accordance with decision 13/COP.14, which requested the GM to support LDN TPP design and facilitate the mobilization of adequate financial resources from all sources of funding, the GM invited country Parties not yet involved in the LDN TPP process to express their interest to receive support for the development of gender-responsive LDN TPPs to translate their LDN targets into concrete actions. A dedicated call was launched on 19 June 2019 and closed at the end of September 2019.

29. The selection of countries among applicants has been based on the availability of funding and the following set of criteria:

(a) The LDN targets are technically validated;

(b) A draft project or programme idea note is available. The idea note should meet the guiding principles of the Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN<sup>23</sup> and the basic principles developed by the GM LDN TPPs, including the contribution to the country's voluntary LDN targets (SDG 15.3).<sup>24</sup> The idea note should include the following elements: title, short rationale including contribution to the achievement of LDN target(s), overall and specific objectives, duration, location (country priority areas/land degradation hotspots), main components and activities, expected results and beneficiaries, implementing partner and cost estimate;

(c) Suggested funding source for the TPP.

30. Furthermore, country Parties which validated their LDN targets after September 2019 and expressed their interest to receive support to design gender-responsive TPPs are being supported due to the demand from countries, which resulted in a decision by the GM to move to an open-ended extension of the call for support, based on availability of current funding from the Republic of Korea through the Changwon Initiative; the Government of Turkey through the Ankara Initiative; and the German Government, among other governments, including new funding made available by the Government of Canada. In addition, the GM is scoping for multi-country projects or programmes to enhance its efficiency in supporting country Parties by establishing partnerships to develop large-scale programmes targeting multiple sources of funding, thereby ensuring that LDN is implemented at scale.

31. Currently the support provided by the GM is delivered by its TPP team, including a consultant recruited by the GM for a period of approximately 8 to 12 months. The consultant is exclusively dedicated to work with the institution hosting the UNCCD national focal point, relevant national stakeholders as well as the implementing partner or accredited entity selected by the country to prepare and submit the project proposal for funding to the targeted financing source identified by the country.

32. Since the launch of the LDN TPP in 2018, key lessons have been learned and improvements made to the operational procedures. On average, it takes between 12 and 24 months to develop a project idea note into an approved concept note by the financing partner such as the GCF and/or GEF. In some cases, pre-feasibility and feasibility studies as well as detailed technical studies such as a gender gap analysis are required depending on the funding source and project focus. Following the approval of the concept note, a full project proposal

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<sup>22</sup> <[www.unccd.int/actions/sustainability-stability-security](http://www.unccd.int/actions/sustainability-stability-security)>.

<sup>23</sup> <<https://knowledge.unccd.int/knowledge-products-and-pillars/guide-scientific-conceptual-framework-land-degradation-neutrality>>.

<sup>24</sup> <<https://knowledge.unccd.int/home/country-information/countries-with-voluntary-ldn-targets>>.

is required to be developed and approved before project implementation commences. Thus, the timelines for project preparation vary and depend on the project cycle of the funding partner.

33. Following the lessons learned to date through the support provided for early stage project preparation, the need to be adaptive and responsive to country Party requests and the need to ensure that support is provided until a project financing agreement is signed, the TPP workstream has expanded since August 2020 and has increased flexibility in the support provided to countries. In addition to the standard technical and financial support to prepare a project concept note, additional support can now be provided on a limited basis for technical studies, pre-feasibility and feasibility studies as well as stakeholder consultations, among other things, depending on the needs identified by the project preparation partners, including the GCF accredited entity or the GEF implementing agency.

### C. Knowledge-sharing

34. Learning from the LDN TSP terminal evaluation, which recommended a more systematic approach to knowledge management, learning and outreach, sharing knowledge is at the core of the TPP process. In order to guide the design of gender-responsive TPPs and provide country Parties with useful tools, the GM developed:

(a) The checklist for LDN TPPs (as mentioned in para. 27 above);

(b) Land Degradation Neutrality Transformative Projects and Programmes – Operational Guidance for Country Support. This guide gathers, in a practical and pragmatic manner, all relevant information related to the development and implementation of LDN TPPs. Countries are provided with guidance on the identification and design of interventions to address land degradation, as well as guidance on their dialogue with funding agencies and implementing partners. The guide is intended for stakeholders involved in the design of LDN TPPs, particularly policymakers, technical experts, international organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector. The guide is currently available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.<sup>25</sup>

(c) A Manual for Gender-Responsive Land Degradation Neutrality Transformative Projects and Programmes. This manual provides step-by-step guidance to Parties on integrating gender issues and promoting gender equality in the design of LDN TPPs. It builds on work launched by the GM, IUCN and UN Women in advising governments on integrating gender perspectives in the development of LDN initiatives, as mandated by the UNCCD Gender Action Plan (GAP), the Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN and related decisions adopted by the COP. The manual is currently available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.<sup>26</sup>

### D. Update on progress

35. Since the initiation of the LDN TPP workstream in 2018 and as of 15 October 2020, the TPP portfolio includes:

(a) 55 national projects involving 52 countries. 14 national project concept notes have been developed; 11 are ongoing and 30 are still to be developed;

<sup>25</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-transformative-projects-and-programmes-operational>>.

<sup>26</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/manual-gender-responsive-land-degradation-neutrality-transformative-projects-and>>.

(b) 6 regional projects involving 38 countries. 5 regional concept notes have been developed and 1 is under development;

(c) 1 GEF Enabling Activity proposal with a global scope currently under development.

36. Taking into consideration all the national and regional concept notes, a total of 71 countries (see annex II) are being supported to develop national and/or regional concept notes. The cumulative total number of concept notes that have been selected to access development funds is 9 concept notes comprised of 7 national concept notes and 2 regional concept notes involving 20 countries in total.

37. Implementing agencies and accredited entities include international partners such as the African Development Bank, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), FAO, IUCN, UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank, as well as national entities accredited to climate funds.

38. The main funding sources targeted by the countries comprise the Adaptation Fund, the GCF and the GEF. There is however a need to strengthen the capacity of the GM to support country Parties in accessing project financing from multilateral development banks, other bilateral and multilateral funders, the private sector, and other sources of innovative financing.

## **E. Case studies on the implementation of land degradation neutrality**

39. Decision 13/COP.14 invited Parties to identify relevant case studies on land degradation neutrality implementation, and requested the secretariat, in collaboration with the GM, to collect these case studies and prepare a synthesis report for consideration by the COP at its fifteenth session. The SPI was requested to contribute to this synthesis report. Within the UNCCD secretariat, the Science, Technology and Innovation unit is collaborating with the GM in this process, and will engage the SPI in the scientific review of the case studies.

40. Due to the general delays in the implementation of projects and the restricted movement of people as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as of 15 October 2020, a concept note was still under development, which was considering the evolving situation in various countries and the practical realities of field operations to collect the data and information for the case studies. The appropriate mode of delivery of the case studies was also being investigated in order to align with the realities on the ground and the most effective ways of communicating the case studies with the target audience.

## **IV. Capacity-building**

41. Decision 2/COP.14 requested the secretariat, the GM and other appropriate UNCCD institutions and bodies, including the SPI, acting within their respective mandates, subject to the availability of resources, to continue supporting capacity-building efforts, in collaboration with relevant partners, to facilitate the achievement of LDN, with particular focus on LDN monitoring and the effective development of LDN TPPs.

42. In order to support gender-responsive LDN TPP design, the GM developed and organized several national and regional training events with UN Women and IUCN in 2018 and 2019 to reinforce capacities of national stakeholders to develop sound gender-responsive LDN projects and tap into different funding sources including climate finance.

43. By October 2020, more than 250 participants/national focal points, including civil society organizations and women's farmers groups, had received hands-on training on how to include gender perspectives in the project cycle.

44. The GM also engaged multilateral funding and technical entities in capacity-building events to disseminate technical aspects of LDN and facilitate exchanges with the UNCCD national focal points and other stakeholders. Regional capacity-building workshops were organized in July 2019 with the African Development Bank in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and with the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization in Bangkok, Thailand. A virtual training session on LDN and gender was also delivered in November 2019 with the United Nations Forum on Forests, which benefited the Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale country members.

45. Similar regional capacity-building workshops were planned in April 2020 in Panama (for Latin American and Caribbean countries), in May 2020 in Izmir, Turkey (for Central and Eastern European countries), in July 2020 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (for African countries) and in the last quarter of 2020 for Arab countries. These events aimed at building the capacities of national focal points, policymakers, civil society, the private sector, young green entrepreneurs, women, and representatives of regional organizations and implementing partners on the land degradation–biodiversity–climate change nexus and generating mutually supporting synergies through the implementation and financing of gender-responsive LDN TPPs, taking into consideration key initiatives such as the Bonn Challenge and commitments on NDCs, LDN, biodiversity and water. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, these events have been postponed sine die. Nevertheless, the GM remains committed to deliver on these as soon as the situation allows and subject to funding availability. Discussions are already ongoing with the partner agencies to adopt alternate practical ways for conducting capacity-building events by combining online tutorials, seminars and in-person working sessions where feasible.

46. The LDN thematic studies referred to in paragraph 18 also contribute to increasing knowledge and capacity-building by raising awareness and increasing understanding of the opportunities that LDN presents to deliver synergies and co-benefits with other social and environmental objectives. These thematic studies explain how voluntary LDN targets and associated measures adopted by UNCCD country Parties can contribute to multiple SDGs.

## V. Conclusions

**47. Based on the mandates granted to the secretariat and the Global Mechanism as contained in the various decisions referenced in the preceding sections and the progress made on LDN TSP and LDN TPPs, the following general conclusions are made:**

**48. The LDN TSP continues to effectively support participating countries in (i) shaping voluntary commitments to achieve LDN in participating countries; (ii) unlocking the potential of land in achieving multiple SDGs; (iii) strengthening policy coherence among national policies, commitments and the national SDG agendas; (iv) engaging key stakeholders across sectors; (v) enhancing national capacities to manage land-related data; (vi) setting baselines using the best available data to provide a systematic approach to monitor progress towards LDN; (vii) providing an avenue for identifying key measures to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation; and (viii) facilitating knowledge-sharing, peer learning and strengthening of coordination among relevant stakeholders at national, regional and global levels.**

**49. As a voluntary, country-driven process, the experience gained since 2016 shows that the success of the LDN target-setting process remains highly dependent on the active engagement and leadership of UNCCD national focal points. In a few cases where this key driving factor was not in place for various reasons (i.e. limited capacity, institutional/political changes, shifting national priorities, etc.), countries were not able to complete their LDN target-setting process despite the support provided through the**

LDN TSP. On the other hand, the adoption of LDN targets at high political level in a considerable number of participating countries (i.e. by ministers, inter-ministerial bodies, cabinet council or the Head of State) sends a clear signal of political commitment and builds stronger momentum for mobilizing the support of technical and financial partners that can assist country Parties in moving from the setting of LDN targets to effective LDN implementation activities.

50. As part of the process of monitoring implementation, country Parties that have already set voluntary LDN targets may wish to consider reviewing and refining or updating their LDN targets by ensuring that, whenever possible, LDN targets are quantitative and spatially explicit to improve land-use decision-making and develop monitoring systems further. In doing so, they may consider strengthening coherence with other ongoing relevant processes (e.g. national SDG agendas, updates of NDCs and national action programmes (NAPs), revised National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) under the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, Bonn Challenge commitments, etc.). These follow-on activities will be particularly relevant in preparation for the next UNCCD national reporting exercise.

51. The LDN target-setting exercise also identified areas requiring enhanced capacity-building at country level, including the effective monitoring of LDN targets. There is a need to provide expertise, tools and training to enhance national capacity to undertake quantitative assessments and the corresponding mapping of their degraded lands. Considering that the monitoring of LDN and SDG indicator 15.3.1 relies, to a large extent, on Earth observations and geospatial information, training is required on the use of available tools for accessing, processing, analysing and interpreting Earth observations data as well as on data validation techniques. Such training would ideally target not only the main entity responsible for LDN implementation and reporting to the UNCCD, but also national statistical offices responsible for SDG monitoring/implementation and relevant specialized agencies.

52. As anticipated, this first attempt at the LDN target-setting process is the initial solid step in a much longer process towards establishing baselines, setting voluntary LDN targets and finally, achieving the desired long-term impact of LDN. To achieve this in as many countries as possible, the LDN TSP will need be continued and refined by building on previous experience and the lessons learned. The results of the assessment on global restoration commitments<sup>27</sup> developed by PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and subsequent findings and recommendations provide a good basis for the evolution and further development of the LDN TSP.

53. LDN TPPs aim to effectively support countries in moving towards implementation by translating LDN targets into concrete actions on the ground and delivering multiple benefits, including contributing to SDGs, creating synergies between the three Rio Conventions, contributing to climate-resilient development and creating social impact through an inclusive approach. Since the initiation of the TPP workstream, the high demand for support to prepare bankable projects and programmes has resulted in a strong project pipeline and an increased need for additional technical and financial resources to turn project idea notes into bankable projects and programmes. The TPP workstream has primarily provided support to develop early-stage project/programme concept notes, aligned with the requirements of the targeted funding source. During this process and to ensure smooth project preparation during the design of the TPP, increasing dialogue and coordination between all stakeholders,

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<sup>27</sup> Available at <<https://www.pbl.nl/en/publications/goals-and-commitments-for-the-restoration-decade>>.

from government to implementing partners and funding sources, is critical to ensure successful LDN implementation at country level.

54. The LDN TPP knowledge products that have been developed ensure that the LDN concept is fully taken into consideration during project design in order to keep the land in balance by avoiding, reducing and reversing land degradation. Special attention has also been paid to gender mainstreaming, and these efforts have more recently been strengthened and complemented by support to specific technical studies to identify interventions that promote gender equality.

55. There is a strong need to strengthen the partnerships among technical and financing partners as well as project preparation experts to accelerate and mobilize resources to support country Parties in the preparation of bankable projects, especially considering the specific technical studies and expertise required to prepare full project documents and large-scale investment programmes aligned with the various funding sources' processes and requirements.

56. Furthermore, the LDN TPP capacity-building activities which are benefitting national focal points, policymakers, civil society, the private sector, young green entrepreneurs, women, and representatives of regional organizations and implementing partners have been a crucial component of the support provided for the development, funding and implementation of gender-responsive TPPs.

## V. Recommendations

57. Recalling the mandates granted to the secretariat and the Global Mechanism as contained in the various decisions referenced in the preceding sections, and taking into consideration the actions taken by both institutions to support the voluntary LDN target-setting exercise and progress towards LDN implementation, the results obtained from these actions, and the several conclusions contained in this report, Parties attending CRIC at its nineteenth session may wish to consider the following recommendations and convey the same for the further consideration of the COP:

(a) Encourage interested Parties to complete their voluntary LDN target-setting processes and adopt their LDN targets at the highest political/institutional level;

(b) Invite Parties to regularly review and update their LDN targets by ensuring that targets are quantitative and spatially-explicit to improve land-use decision-making and develop systems to monitor progress in avoiding, reducing and reversing land degradation;

(c) Invite Parties to strengthen the coherence/alignment of the voluntary LDN target-setting process with other ongoing relevant processes (e.g. national SDG agendas, update of NDCs and NAPs, revised NBSAPs under the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, Bonn Challenge commitments, etc.);

(d) Request the GM and the secretariat, in collaboration with relevant technical and financial partners and subject to available resources, to facilitate an enabling environment for the voluntary review and refinement of voluntary LDN targets and the integration of LDN in relevant land-use planning processes and frameworks;

(e) Request the secretariat and the Global Mechanism, within available resources and in collaboration with relevant partners, to support capacity development for data collection, data analysis, quantitative representation, geo-spatial mapping and monitoring of LDN targets, land-use tracking through online platforms and reporting to UNCCD;

**(f) Request the GM, in collaboration with relevant technical and financial partners and subject to available resources, to forge effective partnerships to accelerate the preparation of bankable projects and large-scale investment programmes addressing DLDD and contributing to LDN by accessing relevant funding sources, including the Adaptation Fund, GCF, GEF, multilateral development banks, other bilateral and multilateral sources, and private sector financing;**

**(g) Further request the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to continue supporting capacity development for project preparation and financing (public and private) and for design and implementation of gender transformative projects and programmes.**



## Annex I

### Decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties at its fourteenth session

In September 2019, the Conference of the Parties (COP) at its fourteenth session provided additional guidance on the importance of the land degradation neutrality (LDN) process to the Convention by:

(a) Inviting Parties, who have not yet done so, to formulate voluntary LDN targets; and also inviting Parties that have committed to voluntary LDN targets to implement measures to accelerate their achievement (decision 3/COP.14);

(b) Requesting the secretariat, the Global Mechanism (GM) and appropriate United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification bodies to develop the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP) and support Parties in implementing it and periodically monitoring its progress, and to continue promoting synergies and knowledge-sharing among Parties participating in the LDN TSP (decision 3/COP.14);

(c) Explicitly acknowledging that the LDN target-setting processes provides an opportunity for countries to promote synergies among the Rio conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements and policy coherence across multiple sectors, particularly as an accelerator for national-level achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (decision 12/COP.14);

(d) Welcoming with appreciation the achievements of the LDN TSP in support of the strong political momentum created by country Parties to achieve LDN and emphasizing the importance of maintaining this momentum by fostering LDN implementation (decision 12/COP.14);

(e) Requesting the secretariat to include regular stocktaking of the voluntary target-setting exercise in official documentation prepared for intersessional sessions of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (decision 12/COP.14);

(f) Also requesting the GM and the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Environment Facility and relevant international partners, to continue supporting the process of voluntary LDN target-setting in those country Parties that may still wish to engage in this process, and also continue sharing relevant knowledge and lessons learned (decision 13/COP.14);

(g) Requesting the secretariat, the GM and other appropriate UNCCD institutions and bodies, including the Science-Policy Interface, acting within their respective mandates, subject to the availability of resources, to continue supporting capacity-building efforts, in collaboration with relevant partners, to facilitate the achievement of LDN, with particular focus on LDN monitoring and the effective development of land degradation neutrality transformative projects and programmes (LDN TPPs) (decision 2/COP.14);

(h) Encouraging Parties, as appropriate, and in particular affected developing country Parties, to develop and implement specific capacity-building programmes to facilitate a more efficacious implementation of the Convention, in particular on the themes of gender-sensitive and transformative approaches, especially, but not limited to, LDN (decision 2/COP.14);

(i) Inviting Parties that have committed to voluntary LDN targets to implement measures to accelerate their achievement, as appropriate, by strengthening national-level

coordination and cooperation based on, inter alia, integrated land-use planning, to guide the implementation of transformative projects and programmes (decision 3/COP.14);

(j) Requesting the secretariat and the GM, within their respective mandates, to support country-level activities towards the implementation of voluntary LDN targets, including through supporting LDN TPPs, and facilitating the mobilization of adequate financial resources from all sources of funding (decision 13/COP.14);

(k) Requesting the GM to continue to engage with multilateral development banks and other relevant funding institutions, including the Green Climate Fund, to facilitate country Parties' access to funding in order to enhance national level synergies between addressing desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) and climate change mitigation and adaptation (decision 13/COP.14);

(l) Also requesting the GM, within its scope and mandate, to support the development of transformative DLDD projects and financing options related to anthropogenic sand and dust storms source mitigation (decision 25/COP.14).

(m) Inviting Parties to identify relevant case studies on LDN implementation, and requesting the secretariat, in collaboration with the GM, to collect these case studies and prepare a synthesis report for consideration by the fifteenth session of the COP (decision 13/COP.14).

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## Annex II

### List of countries participating in the Land Degradation Neutrality Target-Setting Programme as of 15 October 2020

#### Africa (Annex I)

1. Algeria
2. Angola
3. Benin
4. Botswana
5. Burkina Faso
6. Burundi
7. Cameroon
8. Cabo Verde
9. Central African Republic
10. Chad
11. Côte d'Ivoire
12. Comoros
13. Congo
14. Democratic Republic of the Congo
15. Egypt
16. Equatorial Guinea
17. Eritrea
18. Ethiopia
19. Eswatini
20. Gabon
21. Gambia
22. Ghana
23. Guinea
24. Guinea-Bissau
25. Kenya
26. Lesotho
27. Liberia
28. Madagascar
29. Malawi
30. Mali
31. Mauritania
32. Mauritius
33. Morocco
34. Mozambique
35. Namibia
36. Niger
37. Nigeria
38. Rwanda

39. Sao Tome and Principe
40. Sierra Leone
41. Senegal
42. Seychelles
43. Somalia
44. South Africa
45. South Sudan
46. Sudan
47. Togo
48. Tunisia
49. Uganda
50. United Republic of Tanzania
51. Zambia
52. Zimbabwe

**Asia (Annex II)**

53. Bangladesh
54. Bhutan
55. Cambodia
56. China
57. India
58. Indonesia
59. Iran (Islamic Republic of)
60. Iraq
61. Jordan
62. Kazakhstan
63. Kuwait
64. Kyrgyzstan
65. Lao People's Democratic Republic
66. Lebanon
67. Mongolia
68. Myanmar
69. Nepal
70. Niue
71. Pakistan
72. Papua New Guinea
73. Philippines
74. Samoa
75. Sri Lanka
76. Syrian Arab Republic
77. Thailand
78. Timor-Leste
79. Uzbekistan
80. Viet Nam

**Latin America and the Caribbean (Annex III)**

81. Antigua and Barbuda
82. Argentina
83. Barbados
84. Belize
85. Bolivia (Plurinational State of)
86. Brazil
87. Chile
88. Colombia
89. Costa Rica
90. Cuba
91. Dominica
92. Dominican Republic
93. Ecuador
94. El Salvador
95. Guatemala
96. Guyana
97. Grenada
98. Haiti
99. Jamaica
100. Mexico
101. Nicaragua
102. Panama
103. Paraguay
104. Peru
105. Saint Kitts and Nevis
106. Saint Lucia
107. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
108. Suriname
109. Trinidad and Tobago
110. Uruguay
111. Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

**Northern Mediterranean (Annex IV) and Central and Eastern Europe (Annex V)**

112. Armenia
113. Azerbaijan
114. Belarus
115. Bosnia and Herzegovina
116. Georgia
117. Italy
118. Montenegro
119. North Macedonia
120. Republic of Moldova
121. Russian Federation
122. Serbia

123. Turkey

124. Ukraine

## Annex III

### **List of countries benefiting from Global Mechanism support for the development of land degradation neutrality transformative projects and programmes as of 15 October 2020**

#### **Africa (Annex I)**

1. Angola (Regional)
2. Algeria (National)
3. Benin (National and Regional)
4. Botswana (Regional)
5. Burkina Faso (National and Regional)
6. Burundi (National)
7. Cabo Verde (National and Regional)
8. Central African Republic (National)
9. Chad (National and Regional)
10. Côte d'Ivoire ((National and Regional)
11. Comoros (Regional)
12. Eritrea (National)
13. Eswatini (National)
14. Ethiopia (National)
15. Gambia (National and Regional)
16. Ghana (National and Regional)
17. Guinea (National and Regional)
18. Guinea-Bissau (National and Regional)
19. Liberia (National)
20. Madagascar (National and Regional)
21. Malawi (National and Regional)
22. Mali (National and Regional)
23. Mauritania (National and Regional)
24. Mauritius (National and Regional)
25. Mozambique (Regional)
26. Namibia (National and Regional)
27. Niger (Regional)
28. Nigeria (National)
29. Senegal (National and Regional)

30. Seychelles (National and Regional)
31. Sierra Leone (National)
32. South Africa (National)
33. Togo (National and Regional)
34. Tunisia (National)
35. Uganda (National)
36. United Republic of Tanzania (National and Regional)
37. Zambia (National and Regional)
38. Zimbabwe (National and Regional)

**Asia (Annex II)**

39. Bhutan (National)
40. India (National)
41. Iraq (National)
42. Kyrgyzstan (National)
43. Mongolia (National)
44. Nepal (National)
45. Papua New Guinea (National)
46. Philippines (National)
47. Samoa (National and Regional)
48. Syrian Arab Republic (National)
49. Viet Nam (National)

**Latin America and the Caribbean (Annex III)**

50. Antigua and Barbuda (National and Regional)
51. Belize (National and Regional)
52. Bolivia (Plurinational State of) (National)
53. Colombia (National)
54. Dominica (National and Regional)
55. Dominican Republic (National)
56. Grenada (National)
57. Guyana (National and Regional)
58. Haiti (National and Regional)
59. Jamaica (National and Regional)
60. Nicaragua (National)
61. Peru (National)



- 62. Saint Kitts and Nevis (National and Regional)
- 63. Saint Lucia (National and Regional)
- 64. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (National and Regional)
- 65. Suriname (National and Regional)
- 66. Trinidad and Tobago (National and Regional)

**Northern Mediterranean (Annex IV) and Central and Eastern Europe (Annex V)**

- 67. Armenia (National)
  - 68. Belarus (National)
  - 69. Georgia (National)
  - 70. Montenegro (National)
  - 71. Turkey (National)
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