

## ***Land degradation neutral world (LDNW): UNCCD's new paradigm to combat desertification, land degradation and drought***

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### **Background**

Land degradation refers as “Any reduction or loss in the biological or economic productive capacity of the land caused by human activities, exacerbated by natural processes, and often magnified by the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss” (UNCCD, 2013). Land resources are depleting at an alarming rate. Land degradation that leaves millions of people hungry, homeless, destitute and defenseless is a serious global challenge. Sustainable land management significantly impacts on economic growth, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and food security, poverty eradication, women's empowerment, addressing climate change and enhancing the availability of water. Realizing the global aspirations of sustainable development, while fulfilling the requirements of people is increasingly challenging. Land degradation is the key constraint for managing land resources sustainable.

At the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, June 2012), popularly known as Rio+20, the world leaders recognized the economic and social significance of sustainable land and soil management. This conference gave birth to a new paradigm: a land-degradation neutral world (LDNW). Paragraph 206 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document, 'The Future We Want' clearly states that “We recognize the need for urgent action to reverse land degradation. In view of this we will strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development.”

### **UNCCD and COP12 on LDN**

As the apex global Convention related to land matters, the UN Convention to Combat

Desertification (UNCCD) has highlighted the necessity of the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). Attaining LDN will significantly contribute to sustainable development through rehabilitation, restoration, conservation and sustainable management of land resources. This thrust area has become the latest priority goal of the parties to the Convention, also considering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The LDN was the main focus in the decisions taken by country parties at the 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12) of the UNCCD in Ankara, Turkey in October 2015. Despite recent arguments among experts on defining LDN, the Ankara's COP adopted 35 decisions, including a definition on LDN: “A state whereby the amount of healthy and productive land resources, necessary to support ecosystem services, remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales.”

The session's decisions also referred to the Target 15.3 of the SDG No. 15, “By 2020, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world” (UN General Assembly, 2014). This specific target sets out a new global ambition: “To achieve a Land Degradation Neutral World by the year 2030.” Thus to achieve a L. D. N. W. or zero net land degradation, it is necessary to avoid the degradation of productive land and to restore already degraded lands. It must be ensured to avoid degradation of new areas, and make sure that unavoidable degradation of the Earth's land is counterbalanced by restoring and rehabilitating at least an equal amount of already degraded land in the same time span and in the same landscape or at least in the same ecosystem.

The Ministerial Round Table of the COP 12 discussed the theme 'Translating land degradation neutrality into action'. The UNCCD Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) arrived at 8 decisions for consideration of the COP 12, including the establishment of national-level voluntary LDN targets within National Action Programs (NAPs) and national reports, including funding to support national target-setting towards achieving LDN.

***LDN's Synergies with Rio Conventions and other Global Concerns***

The impacts of land degradation affect the sustainability of the entire world, so a more collective global effort is needed to make a significant impact. Land resources – soil, water and biodiversity – are the main pillars upon which the life on earth depends on. Therefore, the significance of contribution of the LDN was taken into consideration at Rio+20 Conference in 2012 and subsequent global events held.

Land Degradation is a global concern for sustainable development, conservation of biodiversity and mitigating and adapting to climate change. Land degradation processes reduce carbon storage in soil and vegetation and drive the loss of biodiversity and climate change. It is vital that land degradation receives adequate attention from the nature conservation community, and that it is addressed pro-actively in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Land Degradation should not be solely regarded as the domain of the UNCCD, given the close links with other environmental and sustainable development challenges, including poverty, climate change and biodiversity loss.

Scientists and practitioners increasingly recognize that reversing land degradation is essential if we are to achieve the goals of the UNCCD, CBD or the UNFCCC as well as to continue meeting related sustainable development targets. It is crucial that



the progress towards LDN respects biodiversity and ecosystems and contributes to and benefits from achievement of other multilateral environmental agreements.

***How to assess the rate of land degradation***

The most common methods used to assess land degradation are expert opinions, land users' opinions, field monitoring, observations and measurements, modeling, estimates of productivity changes, geographic information system and remote sensing.

***How productivity of land is increased?***

Progress towards the land degradation neutrality target can be monitored and communicated in terms of increased productivity, vegetative cover, biodiversity and ecosystem services and the resulting socio-economic benefits. Sustainable land management (SLM) practices, such as agro-forestry and conservation agriculture can boost yields and prevent future land degradation. Land rehabilitation and ecosystem services activities can also help to recover productive capacity and other important services affected by mismanagement. Mobilize people to achieve LDN goal or target is also an important strategy.

***Pathways of action***

As outlined by the UNCCD, there are diverse pathways of action to attain a land degradation neutral world. Some of which are arresting further degradation by managing productive and protected lands in ways that prevent or minimize degradation, as well as restoring and rehabilitating degraded land; practicing SLM; applying community based and traditional approaches; paying for ecosystem services by paying land users to restore abandoned degraded lands and managing these lands for the primary purpose of restoring the natural functions of the land's ecosystems.

***WDCD-2016 theme “Inclusive cooperation for achieving Land Degradation Neutrality”***

Considering the significant importance of LDN on achieving SDGs, this year's World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD) advocates for the importance of involving all actors as the key for making LDN to restore and rehabilitate degraded land and further contribute towards achieving the other SDGs.

With the above theme the UNCCD - WDCD 2016 disseminate the message that achieving LDN is one of the most cost-effective ways not only to fight against hunger but also to adapt with several other global environmental issues climate change, water security energy resources and promote inclusive growth.

