

United Nations Convention
to Combat Desertification
12th Session of the Conference
of the Parties (COP12)

Summary for policymakers



Ankara, Turkey
From 12 to 23 October, 2015

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Drafting Committee and Editorial Committee

UNISFÉRA International Centre

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From the Director

The 12th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on the Combat Desertification (COP 12) will be held in Ankara, Turkey from October 12 to 23, 2015. The session constitutes an opportunity to identify and implement sustainable solutions for sustainable land management and avoid environmental crises and improve the livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities. The previous session (COP 11), held in Windhoek, Namibia, achieved significant progress on a number of issues, including the Ten-year strategic framework for the implementation of the Convention, governance and institutional arrangements for the GM. But many challenges remain for both issues specific to the implementation of the Convention as well pertaining to the global governance of sustainable development.

Restoration of degraded lands contributes to sustainable development and will be key to the achievement of many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is therefore timely that COP 12 is being held just a few weeks after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will address some very critical issues for the further implementation of the Convention. The Conference shall, among other things, define its strategy for the integration of the SDGs and UNCCD implementation.

Increasingly, global financial flows will focus on the SDGs. It is therefore important that developing countries position themselves to take advantage of available resources. The SDGs, which are part and parcel of the new development agenda, take into account the fight against desertification, including land degradation neutrality, as affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly. Hence, Ankara will provide a forum for UNCCD country Parties to address options and means for the integration of the SDGs and UNCCD implementation.

Moreover, from November 30 to December 11, 2015, a month after the meeting in Ankara, the international community will meet in Paris for the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP 21) to adopt a new climate agreement. COP 12 on desertification and COP 21 on climate represent an opportunity to strengthen synergies between the fight against desertification and land degradation, and climate change efforts. In this perspective, we welcome the fact that the high level segment of UNCCD COP 12 will include discussions on climate change, water and drought in the context of desertification, and land degradation neutrality.

At COP 12, Country Parties, and other development actors, must continue to discuss ways and means to implement concrete actions to curb land degradation.

The Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF - *International Organization of the Francophonie*) attaches great importance to the implementation of the desertification convention as a tool to fight poverty and promote sustainable

development. It is in this sense that in the Final Declaration of the 15th Francophonie Summit held in Dakar in 2014, the Heads of State and Government emphasized the urgency of making operational the Green Fund to support, among others, the fight against deforestation and desertification.

Through the IFDD, a subsidiary body, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF - *International Organization of the Francophonie*), which is involved in this process through its member-states, hopes this *Summary for policymakers* will shed light on the issues to be addressed at COP 12.

This *Summary for policymakers* was produced in partnership with UNISFÉRA. The IFDD welcomes this good cooperation.

Dear negotiators, dear partners, I wish you excellent work and successful results in Ankara.

Jean Pierre NDOUTOUM

Introduction

This summary is intended for policymakers attending the Twelfth Conference of the Parties (COP 12) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which runs from October 12 to 22, 2015, in Ankara, Turkey.

The first pages contain a summary table of the main issues to be discussed at the COP 12, the fourteenth meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 14), and the twelfth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 12). Then, Part 1 succinctly describes those issues.

Part 2 contains a supplementary analysis of three key topics that will be discussed during the meetings: a) land degradation neutrality; b) the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNCCD and c) synergies among the Rio conventions.

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Summary table

of the main issues in Ankara

Main issues	Agenda Item			Section of the guide	Section of this summary
	CdP	CRIC	CST		
Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: Implications for the Convention					
Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Land Degradation Neutrality	2a			3.1.1	1.3.1
Integration of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets and UNCCD implementation	2b			3.3.1	1.3.1
Implications of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals for the delivery of science and policy efforts of the Convention, including the review of the report of the CST and its recommendations to the COP	2c			3.1 et 3.3.1	1.1.2
Formulation, revision and implementation of action programmes in view of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development		2d		3.2.1	1.2.1
The UNCCD reporting and review process in view of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development		4		3.2.3	1.2.3
Monitoring progress towards a Sustainable Development Goal on land degradation and associated target			3a)i)	3.1.2	1.1.2
Implementation of the comprehensive communication strategy and the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020)	2d			3.3.1	1.3.1
Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels	3	2			
Trends in the implementation of the UNCCD, including the review of the report of the CRIC and its recommendations to the COP	3a			3.3.2	1.3.2
Trends in implementation of the Convention, including review of the report of the CRIC on its thirteenth session		2a		3.2.1	1.2.1
Synergies between the Rio conventions					

Main issues	Agenda Item			Section of the guide	Section of this summary
	CdP	CRIC	CST		
Leveraging of synergies among the Rio conventions, including land-based adaptation to climate change and related advice from the Science-Policy Interface	3b			3.3.2	1.3.2
Monitoring the contribution of sustainable land use and management to climate change adaptation/mitigation and to the safeguarding of biodiversity and ecosystem services			3a)ii)	3.1.2	1.1.2
Scientific aspects					
Outcomes of the 3rd Scientific Conference			2	3.1.1	1.1.1
Options for improving the CST inputs to decision-making, including through synergies with other relevant scientific conferences			3b	3.1.2	1.1.2
Linking scientific knowledge with decision-making			4	3.1.2	1.1.2
Work programme of the Science-Policy Interface for the biennium 2016–2017			4a	3.1.2	1.1.2
Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal and promoting the analysis and dissemination of best practices			4b	3.1.2	1.1.2
Securing of additional investments: relations with financial mechanisms	3c	2e		3.3.2 et 3.2.1	1.3.2
Global Mechanism	3c i			3.3.2	1.3.2
Global Environment Facility	3c ii			3.3.2	1.3.2
Consideration of best practices in the implementation of the Convention		3		3.3.2	1.2.2
Programme and budget	5			3.3.4	1.3.3
Programme and budget for the biennium 2016–2017	5a			3.3.4	1.3.3
Financial performance for the Convention trust funds, including an update on the arrangements for the Global Mechanism	5b			3.3.4	1.3.3
Evaluation reports	5c			3.3.4	1.3.3
Multi-year workplan of the Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies		2b		3.3.4	1.3.3
Performance of the Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies		2c		3.3.4	1.3.3
Procedural matters	6	5	5	3.3.5	1.3.4
Maintenance of the roster of experts and the creation, as necessary, of ad hoc panels of experts	6a		5a	3.3.5	1.3.4

Main issues	Agenda Item			Section of the guide	Section of this summary
	CdP	CRIC	CST		
Revised procedures for the accreditation of civil society organizations and representatives from the private sector	6b			3.3.5	1.3.4
Rule 47 of the rules of procedure	6c			3.3.5	1.3.4
Procedures and institutional mechanisms for the resolution of questions on implementation	6d			3.3.5	1.3.4
Annexes containing arbitration and conciliation procedures	6e			3.3.5	1.3.4
Request submitted by Annex V country Parties regarding the mandate and scope of the Convention	6f			3.3.5	1.3.4

Part 1.

Deciphering the main topics on the agenda of the sessions of COP 12, CRIC 14 and CST 12: Ankara, Turkey, October 2015

1.1 Twelfth session of the CST

1.1.1 Report of the CST S-4 and outcomes of the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference

The CST will consider the reports of CST S-4 (ICCD/CST(S-4)/3) and of the 3rd Scientific Conference (ICCD/COP(12)/CST/2). The latter report contains a number of proposals for further CST and SPI work. It also contains the result of research by the ISP on emerging issues of policies related to desertification and land degradation. To improve the impact of scientific activities already undertaken by the UNCCD, the SPI has identified new research approaches. The CST will be invited to make recommendations accordingly to the COP.

1.1.2 Work programme of the CST for the next biennium

One of the main topics to be addressed by the CST concerns the 2030 Agenda. It comprises two aspects: monitoring of the progress towards the adoption of a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and of a target related the fight against land degradation, and the monitoring of the impacts of sustainable land management on climate change and biodiversity.

Regarding the monitoring of SDG 15 and of its target related to LDN, the secretariat tested the monitoring method for reporting to the UNCCD as per Decision 22/COP.11. These tests were carried out as part of LDN initiatives. They thus serve the dual purpose of determining whether the method allows to improve UNCCD reporting and to establish whether to adopt one or more LDN targets. The report of the secretariat (ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7) will be submitted to the CST and CRIC. The report indicates that the test results have not yet been fully compiled; Parties may need more time and resources to do this. The COP will be asked to make a decision based on the recommendations of the CST.

The second aspect of monitoring pertains to the impact of SLM on climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as on the support of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Pursuant to decision 23/COP.11, the SPI submitted proposals to the CST to serve as the basis of recommendations to the COP. The documents dealing with this issue are contained in document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7), which contains the findings of the SPI, and ICCD/COP 12)/CST/INF.1.

Concerning the work of the UNCCD, the SPI established indicators for determining the integrated potential of the three Rio conventions. A framework, called Resilience, Adaptation and Transformation Pathways Assessment – RAPTA, was developed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). It consists of a multi-stakeholder approach whose indicators allow for needs identification with respect to resilience and adaptation. The SPI also submits proposals for monitoring the work. Document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.1 prepared by the secretariat complements the previous report.

The CST will look into options to improve its inputs to decision making, in particular through synergies with other relevant scientific conferences. This discussion follows decision 21/COP.11. It will focus on the notes presented by the secretariat, including the SPI report prepared for this purpose. ICCD/COP (12)/CST/4 concludes that the scientific conferences have had a direct effect on UNCCD policies, but that this beneficial effect can be further improved. It therefore suggests a number of options to improve this influence. ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.2, which specifically covers the first and second conferences, also found this positive impact.

In order to better link scientific knowledge with decision-making, the CST will be called upon to analyse the work of the SPI, established by decision 23/COP.11. Its analysis will be based on several documents prepared by the secretariat. ICCD/COP(12)/CST/6 contains the report of the work done by the SPI and its proposals to the CST. Document ICCD/COP (12)/CST/INF.4 focuses on the fourth objective of the SPI work program, focusing on its cooperation with the (Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soil (ITPS)).

Moreover, the CST will be making other recommendation to link scientific knowledge to decision-making. It will address the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal, established by decision 24/COP.11, as well as the issue of dissemination of knowledge on best practices, as per decision 17/COP.11. The discussions will be guided by documents prepared by the secretariat. See the section on CRIC 14 for a summary of report ICCD/COP(12)/CST/7-ICCD/CRIC (14)/6 and of document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.5, which addresses more specifically the Portal. The document indicates what might be the next steps in the development of this Portal: greater number of partners and their automated access to the databases, quality improvement through research partnerships, improved interface, and increased access to other sources of knowledge.

1.2 Fourteenth session of the CRIC

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

The results of the institutions and subsidiary bodies of the Convention must be reviewed by the CRIC in accordance with decisions 11/COP.9 and 1/COP.10. The document prepared by the secretariat in this regard (ICCD/CRIC(14)/3), contains a report of the achievements pursuant to each of operational objectives. For the period 2014-2015, the document highlights that awareness of the international community to the need to establish land restoration targets, and to the fact that they are linked to other environmental and social issues, including climate change, has increased. The document report on new opportunities for funding, and indicates that reporting by the Parties has improved. It also reports that scientific collaboration has increased and that the UNCCD enjoys more support from CSOs.

Document ICCD/CRIC(14)/3 produced by the secretariat has already been the subject of official comments from various countries and will be the subject of discussions within regional groups. The most salient points relate to the periodicity of meetings of the CRIC and their possible replacement by regional meetings, which will eventually lead to discussions on the mandate of the CRIC.

With regard to national action programs, decision 2/COP.11 requested Parties to develop and/or align them with The Strategy. It also requested CRIC 13 to design a plan for the NAP alignment process with the general objectives of SLM, which was done. The plan proposes that Parties take into account the SDGs for the post-2015 period. The plan proposed by CRIC 13 was updated by the secretariat in document ICCD/CRIC(14)/4, which also takes into account the report of the IWG. Based on a review of statistics, the document concludes that alignment is progressing more slowly than expected, but that it should be completed by the end of 2016.

In its note, the secretariat proposes the adoption of a global target and of national targets, listing the benefits they can bring to the achievement of the objectives of the UNCCD. A target should consider available data on the trends and causes of desertification, actions undertaken, projections, synergistic impacts of desertification and climate change, as well as the necessary resources. These elements are usually already contained in the NAPs. Nationally developed targets will depend on circumstances, but must follow the agreed indicators and methodology. Options for determining this target were tested in 14 countries, as reported in the appendix of the document.

As for financing, the GEF is already involved in relation to desertification. In addition, the Green Climate Fund has funds for adaptation to climate change, which can be used for land management. Finally, the GM is working to create a LDN Fund. Full details on these issues are contained in the above-mentioned document prepared by the secretariat. CRIC 14 will be invited to consider this document and to prepare a draft decision to the COP.

With regard to relationships with financial mechanisms to further investment to support UNCCD implementation, a standing item on the agenda of the COP since decision 9/COP.1, CRIC 14 will focus on the GEF, which produced a report, in accordance with the memorandum of understanding adopted by decision 6/COP.7, on its funding strategies, programs and projects related to desertification (ICCD / CRIC (14) / 5).

1.2.2 Best practices

In accordance with decision 17/COP.11, the secretariat submits simultaneously to the CRIC and CST a report on best practices related to the implementation of the Convention (ICCD/COP(12)/CST/7-ICCD CRIC(14)/6). Both committees are invited to consider this report and make recommendations to the COP.

Regarding technologies for sustainable land management, including adaptation, the UNCCD, following a selection process, has concluded an agreement with the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT). WOCAT, along with the University of Bern, is now in charge of maintaining the database on best practices. The transfer of data from the PRAIS to the WOCAT secretariat took place on July 4, 2014. The agreement also established a steering committee to monitor the project, whose first meeting (November 28, 2014) is reported in the secretariat document.

With regard to financing and resource mobilization, several discussions have taken place since the last meeting of the CRIC, when the GM reported that it had not received any proposal for a database on best practices in financing. However, the GM developed, with funding from the Government of Norway and the EU, a “Finance Info Kit” in the form of a directory listing the different funding sources.¹ This kit has been cited by the UN Joint Inspection Unit as a model for the management of best practice among information systems on financing for climate change.²

Moreover, decision 13/COP.9 requested that best practices be grouped according to seven themes, five of which not having yet been developed, despite two subsequent decisions on this issue: 15/COP.10 and 17/COP. 11. For now, only information on best practices in sustainable land management technologies, including adaptation, has been compiled. The secretariat suggests that the COP agree that the UNCCD only refer to the other topics³ by linking to the websites of institutions that already deal with these topics, and have compiled relevant information.

1. Available at : <<http://globalmechanism.org/our-services/finance-info-kit>>.

2. Promoting the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices and the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal, ICCD/COP(12)/CST/7-ICCD/CRIC(14)/6 (<<http://www.unccd.int/Lists/OfficialDocuments/cop12/cst7eng.pdf>>).

3. Capacity building and awareness raising; Monitoring, evaluation and research in the fields of desertification, land degradation, drought and sustainable land management; Knowledge management and decision making support; Policy, legislative and institutional framework; Participation, cooperation and networking. See decision 13/COP.9, ICCD/COP(9)/18/Add.1 (<<http://www.unccd.int/Lists/OfficialDocuments/cop9/18-add1fre.pdf>>).

In terms of knowledge management, the information submitted to the CRIC pertains to the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal. Decision 3/COP.8 requested the CST, with other relevant institutions, to create and pilot this Portal. This mandate is detailed in decision 21/COP.10 and 24/COP.11 and in ICCD COP(11)/CST/6. A pilot test of the Portal was conducted in 2014, which was improved in 2015.

1.2.3 The UNCCD reporting and review process in view of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

COP 12 will be asked to consider a number of recommendations pertaining to the revision of the processes of communication and review of reports on the implementation of the Convention, in view of the data contained in these reports.

Pursuant to decisions 14/COP.11, 16/COP.11 and 22/COP.11, the secretariat and the GM produced three documents presenting simplified and improved frameworks for the preparation of the reports to be provided by the Parties. The first pertains to strategic objectives 1, 2, and 3 (ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7), the second strategic objective 4 (ICCD/CRIC(14)/8), and the third describes the iterative process for assessing implementation (ICCD/CRIC(14)/9). This third document stresses that despite a decrease in requests for assistance from Parties to the UNCCD in terms of reporting, challenges remain, with regard to Party capacity and available information. In the absence of a comprehensive database of financial information on domestic and private flows, it is not possible to generate comprehensive statistics. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a global support programme funded by GEF and UNEP has enabled the development of capacity for reporting. In its conclusions, the secretariat document offers recommendations in light of the many persistent limitations to data gathering.

Recommendations from the secretariat (ICCD/CRIC(14)/10) include: request Parties to focus performance reporting on key performance indicators; encourage Parties to incorporate LDN targets in their reports (ICCD/COP (12)/4 and ICCD/CRIC(14)/4); decide that the reports on financial flows should comply with the procedures defined in ICCD/CRIC(14)/8 and use, to the extent possible, the default data to be validated by the Parties; and reiterate that the progress reports should comply with decision 22 COP.11 and focus on a set of core indicators of progress to be validated, as presented in ICCD/COP(12), CST 3-ICCD/CRIC (14)/7 and ICCD/CRIC(14)/8.

Regarding the frequency of reporting and review mode, it is suggested that reports on the performance, progress and financial flows be prepared every four years starting during the biennium 2016-2017, and that they be considered every four years by the CRIC during its intersessional meeting, starting during the 2018-2019 biennium. Intersessional meetings of the CST would be held immediately before those of CRIC, and the total duration of these two meetings would be five working days. In addition, regional meetings of the Annexes would be held immediately

prior to the intersessional meetings of the CST and CRIC. Each recommendation includes requests to the secretariat and/or the GM for the implementation of the necessary tools.

Parties may also consider the recommendations contained in documents ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7, ICCD/CRIC(14)/8 and ICCD/CRIC(13)/9.

1.3 Twelfth session of the COP

Three issues will be central to all discussions at COP 12: land degradation neutrality (LDN), integration of the SDGs into the implementation of the UNCCD and the synergy of environmental conventions and international initiatives on sustainable development.

1.3.1 Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: Implications for the Convention

Land Degradation Neutrality

Resolution 66/288 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, adopted in the context of Rio+20, called its Member States to strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world. This approach will be further discussed within the UNCCD, following the debates that took place at COP 11. Decision 8/COP.11 established an Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) to address the issues of LDN. COP 12 will be asked to address this issue again taking into consideration recent developments, including the adoption by the General Assembly in September 2015 of the 2030 Agenda.

Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group⁴

As noted above, the last COP adopted decision 8/COP.11, creating an IWG to study the LDN. Its task was divided into three areas: definition of LDN; options for achieving the LDN and; implications on current and future strategies, as well as programmes and resources. The IWG was to take into account the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), relevant economic studies produced by the science-policy interface (SPI), and synergies to be established with relevant conventions.

IWG members were not unanimous as to the scope of the definition to be adopted for LDN. The proposed definition is the following (the brackets indicate unresolved options):

4. Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Land Degradation Neutrality, ICCD/COP(12)/4, online: <[<http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/official-documents/Pages/SymbolDetail.aspx?k=ICCD/COP\(12\)/4&ctx=COP\(12\)>](http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/official-documents/Pages/SymbolDetail.aspx?k=ICCD/COP(12)/4&ctx=COP(12))>.

“Land degradation neutrality [in affected areas] [in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas] is a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remain stable or increase within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems.”

At the national level, management options have two components: prevention and rehabilitation. Prevention can be done by taking into account resilience in land use planning, and through sustainable resource management. Rehabilitation can be achieved by reducing the causes of desertification and through rehabilitation projects. In terms of national policies, the IWG concludes that the national action programs should integrate LDN.

The operationalization of LDN is based on various aspects that can be summarized as: measurement of degradation, identification of its causes, development of sustainable landscape management, integration of LDN into the different national strategies to ensure multi-sectoral coordination, taking into account local, traditional and scientific knowledge, and the development of communication strategies.

Integration of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets and UNCCD implementation

The integration of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) to the implementation of the UNCCD will be an important issue at COP 12. The SDG were developed in the context of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs responds to the need identified at the Rio+20 summit to agree on universal goals that balance the three dimensions of sustainable development. The SDGs will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The secretariat prepared a note (ICCD/COP(12)/4), based on the report of the IWG-LDN and CRIC 13, on the integration of the sustainable development goals in the implementation of the UNCCD. The secretariat notes that the General Assembly is considering the adoption of a Sustainable Development Goal related to the fight against desertification, as well as a target related to LDN. The secretariat also indicates that it is working with the GM on the creation of a fund dedicated to LDN, in the form of a public-private investment platform.

According to the secretariat, setting a target related to LDN would be the most effective way to support the implementation of the current strategy of the UNCCD. The secretariat lists a number of recommendations to be considered by Parties at COP. The secretariat suggests that Parties recognize that achieving an LDN target is conducive to the fulfilment of the three dimensions of sustainable development, and that LDN can serve as a basis for the development of programmes to implement the Convention. Affected country Parties are invited in particular to establish LDN targets and to integrate it into their national programmes. Developed country Parties, other governments, the private sector, civil society and technical and financial institutions are invited to provide technical, scientific and financial assistance, and establish equitable partnerships.

The secretariat has developed basic common indicators for monitoring the implementation of SDG 15, including its target 15.3, and that after having presented them to the UNFCCC and CBD, it has submitted them to the United Nations Statistical Commission (ICCD/COP(12)/17 and ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7). The development of indicators for SDG monitoring should be completed by March 2016, according to information contained in ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7.

Land Degradation Neutrality: Front and Center in the Development and Climate Agendas

On 25-27 September 2015, the UN General Assembly ratified *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. “Halting and reversing land degradation” headlines SDG 15 and “achieving a land degradation neutral world by 2030” is the feature of target 15.3. In December 2015, the world will welcome a new climate agreement that includes commitments to reduce emissions and slow global warming. Once again, the land-use sector will feature prominently to keep us on track to meet the 2° C target. As delegates to UNCCD COP12, you are gathering in Ankara at a critical juncture between the launch of these two historic agendas that will set the future course of civilization. The health and productivity of the ground that you stand on will determine the success or failure of the human endeavor.

The objective of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) is to maintain and increase the amount of healthy and productive land resources over time and in line with national development priorities. Achieving LDN will have immediate and cumulatively significant benefits for both climate change mitigation and adaptation. It will also be a critical pathway of action to meet the food, water and energy needs of the close to 10 billion people by the year 2050. Agriculture, forestry and other land uses represent approximately 25% of anthropogenic GHG emissions: half of which come from agricultural production and half from land use change (e.g. forest clearing, wetland drainage). While the mitigation potential of the land use sector is still not fully recognized in the climate negotiations, LDN activities as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will contribute significantly to both reduced emissions and increased rates of sequestration.

UNCCD’s Commitment to Sustainable Development

The LDN target presents new opportunities for countries to benefit from increased awareness and investments in sustainable land management and restoration from both private and public sources. In this regard, the report of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on the follow up to Rio+20 (ICCD/COP(12)/4) and Parties at CRIC 13 (ICCD/CRIC(140/4) present various options for implementing the LDN target and creating incentives and mobilizing resources in the context of the Convention. The UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) are currently in the process of developing the LDN fund, a public-private investment platform to help ensure adequate, predictable and timely financial resources for large-scale rehabilitation activities.

Deliberations at UNCCD COP12 will include the possible adoption of voluntary LDN targets as the primary vehicle for driving implementation of the Convention and achieving its priority objectives as currently formulated in The Strategy. In addition, the Parties may wish to consider endorsing the definition of LDN as proposed by the IWG with the aim of furthering the UNCCD's custodianship of the LDN target and increasing synergies with the 2030 Agenda and the other Rio conventions. The terms of reference for developing plans to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD's existing strategy would include prioritizing assistance to countries in setting national LDN targets within the context of sustainable development and creating the enabling environment for their implementation and monitoring. In this regard, it may be prudent to consider a 2016–2030 time horizon in order to align with the financing and monitoring instruments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Climate Action through Sustainable Land Management

Striving to achieve the LDN target translates into meaningful climate action by: 1) protecting our natural carbon sinks like forests, grasslands and wetlands, 2) scaling up sustainable land management practices that reduce emissions, increase productivity and prevent further land use change, and 3) restoring degraded ecosystems for improved resilience and long term carbon storage.

Due to current trends in land degradation, our communities and ecosystems are failing to cope with the impacts of climate change, especially the challenges of growing water scarcity and prolonged drought. Many livelihoods in the developing world are closely linked to the health and productivity of the land. The LDN target will promote investments in local communities, empower them to recover the lost productive potential of their land and better absorb the shocks and stressors associated with climate change.

LDN activities need not be expensive or complex. For example, it can take as little as USD 20 to rehabilitate one hectare of farmland in Africa using traditional agro-forestry, water conservation and livestock management practices. These low-cost practices along with large-scale rehabilitation projects, such as those expected to be funded by the proposed UNCCD's new LDN Fund, could help recover the productivity of 12 million hectares per year. Under this scenario, by the year 2030, the combined restoration of approximately 150 million hectares of degraded lands could provide US\$30–40 billion/year in extra smallholder income, additional food for close to 200 million more people, more resilient landscapes, and an additional 2 GtCO₂e/yr sequestered.

LDN activities almost always come with adaptation benefits creating a pathway to enhanced resilience for land-dependent communities. With healthy and productive land, these communities will be able to respond to and minimize climate impacts while improving their livelihood strategies. There is still time to strengthen the commitments in the land-use sector in the climate negotiations and the UNCCD COP12 decisions could send a strong signal that LDN is an important link between the development and climate agendas.

Source: UNCCD secretariat

Implementation of the comprehensive communication strategy and the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020)

The UNCCD comprehensive communication strategy was developed pursuant to decision 3/COP.8. The communication strategy was given a new impetus after Rio+20, when the General Assembly called for a land degradation neutral world. The secretariat submitted a report on the progress of the implementation of the communication strategy in accordance with decision (4/COP.11). The secretariat also reports on the implementation of decision 7/COP.11 on the implementation of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification. Both reports can be found in document ICCD/COP(12)/2.

The secretariat also indicates that it has updated the storyline it uses when referring to desertification. Rather than focusing on the land itself, the focus is placed on the impact desertification has on people and the help they need. The secretariat mentions having received excellent cooperation from the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) in this regard.

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

Trends in the implementation of the UNCCD

By decision 3/COP.11, the COP requested stakeholders to take a number of actions. The secretariat prepared a report on the progress of the implementation of that decision (ICCD/COP(12)/12).

The first focus of the report is on the strengthening of the institutional framework. Regional Coordination Mechanisms, which include the Regional Coordination Units (RCUs), have been put in place pursuant to decision 3/COP.9. The secretariat and the GM are supporting the RCUs. The role of RCUs is important. Considering the limited means of RCUs, which usually have only one employee, their task is difficult. RCUs only exist for three regions: Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Central and Eastern Europe. The other regions are not considering establishing RCUs at this time.

The second focus of the report is on the promotion of regional cooperation. The secretariat lists the initiatives that have been reported by each region, including those involving civil society, which, according to the secretariat, has been particularly active in this regard during the last biennium.

The third focus of the report concerns the facilitation of the implementation at regional level. First, decision 3/COP.11 asked each region to ensure that their own priorities were adequately reflected in the action programs. The alignment process of subregional action programs has been completed in three regions in Africa, and is in the process of being completed in the southern region of the con-

continent. In Asia, some work has been done, and the programme of central Asian countries will be implemented with funding from the FAO, the governments as well as the government of Turkey, and other institutions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, no program has been implemented, except that of Trinidad and Tobago. This program, however, is threatened by lack of funds in 2016.⁵ In Central and Eastern Europe, the process is well supported. Six regional projects and eight global projects related to land degradation have been set up with funding from the GEF.

Finally, the secretariat highlights several new cooperative initiatives. The GM is engaged in many of them: the International Land Coalition, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration, the FAO Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism, the Forest Ecosystem Restoration Initiative, the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature Initiative and the International Year of Soils. These initiatives favour cooperation on sustainable land management, and support advocacy for more funding for sustainable land management. The secretariat and the GM also fostered North-South and South-South partnerships through projects such as Changwon Initiative and the Kubuqi International Forum on Deserts. The secretariat, with the assistance of relevant RCUs, developed a research project on the economics of land degradation in Central Asia, which is supported by several partners.

Leveraging of synergies among the Rio conventions, including land-based adaptation to climate change

As recognized by the UN General Assembly on the occasion of Rio+20, desertification has a direct impact on the subject matter of all the Rio conventions, which means that cooperation among conventions is essential. In September 2014, the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio conventions agreed on the need to focus on issues of common interest, while respecting the obligations comprised in each of the conventions.

With the support of France, the secretariat has started work on the development of common indicators for monitoring the implementation of SDG 15 and target of 15.3. The approach advocated by the secretariat was presented to the UNFCCC Adaptation Committee and at COP 12 of the CBD. In March 2015, the secretariat submitted three proposed indicators to the United Nations Statistical Commission⁶: trends in land cover, trends in land productivity or functioning of the land, and trends in carbon stocks above and below ground. These have been tested on a

5. Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels, ICCD/COP(12)/12, at 7 (<<http://www.unccd.int/Lists/OfficialDocuments/cop12/12eng.pdf>>).

6. The development of the SDG indicator framework will follow a multistage process culminating in March 2016 with the final recommendations of the UNSC, according to document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7.

voluntary basis since May 2014 as part of an LDN project in 16 affected countries belonging to five regions. The GEF and the secretariat have also started to develop joint indicators the Rio Conventions and the GEF could use. Several other entities have expressed interest in working on common indicators. The CBD initiated a framework study on an integrated information system and indicators for the three Rio Conventions, and several entities, including the UNCCD, participate in discussions surrounding this study.

The UNCCD has relationships with a number of organizations, including the FAO, a key partner in soil management. The report of the secretariat lists a number of areas in which the UNCCD is collaborating with FAO. Also, meetings were held between the science-policy interface (SPI) and the Technical Intergovernmental Panel of the Global Soil Partnership, in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to identify possible areas of cooperation.

The secretariat is working with the Technical Cooperation Department of the International Atomic Energy Agency to develop isotopes that can provide information on soils. And, cooperation with several entities has helped develop a training program on national policies on drought management.

In November 2014, the UNCCD secretariat issued a joint statement with the Ramsar Convention on wetlands calling for a more resilient future. In June 2015, the secretariat worked with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on a collaborative framework. The IUCN houses the secretariat of the Global Partnership for Forest and Landscape Restoration, of which the UNCCD is a member. The UNCCD can use this partnership to promote the Bonn Challenge, an international commitment to restore 150 million hectares of deforested lands by 2020. As a member of the Collaborative Partnership on Mediterranean Forests, the UNCCD was able to raise the awareness of other members on the value of reforestation in the fight against land degradation. On the linkages between migrations and desertification, the UNCCD has begun working in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration. This partnership has already borne some fruit in West Africa. As founding members of the TerrAfrica partnership, the secretariat and the GM have supported the implementation of its 2014-2015 work plan. The GM has contributed to the Council of the International Land Coalition, offered support to the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, and worked with the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature Initiative. Pursuant to decision 23/COP.11, the science-policy interface worked with the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), to which it provided relevant information.

In conclusion, the secretariat suggests that the Parties consider endorsing the proposed indicators, in order to create a common reporting system to the three Rio conventions. This system would also be consistent with progress indicators adopted by decision 22/COP.11 and with the proposal by the secretariat for a

global indicator on trends in land degradation based on the three indicators of progress of the Convention, to monitor the LDN target in the context of sustainable development goals.⁷

The document prepared by the secretariat should be read in conjunction with other documents prepared for the CST 12 (ICCD/COP(12)/CST/6, ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.3 and ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.4), and this section of the summary should be read in conjunction with the section on the CST 12.

ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.3 states that the institutions of the UNCCD should continue to work in synergy with the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). It also suggests that synergies be addressed in reports pertaining to land degradation and restoration.

The Rio Conventions Pavilion will hold workshops on synergies at COP 12.⁸

Securing of additional investments in the UNCCD

Global Mechanism

Decision 14/COP.11 asked the GM to assist affected country Parties in assessing their financial needs, and to explore innovative ways of mobilizing financial flows for the implementation of the Convention. It also asked the GM to submit a proposal on this matter at COP 12. Furthermore, decision 1/COP.11 asked the GM to increase its support to capacity building to enable affected countries to better identify and seize funding opportunities. At COP 12, the GM will hold a meeting to report on the implementation of these decisions. The relevant documents to be consulted in relation to these issues are the multi-year workplan (ICCD/COP(12)/6), and documents related to the financial statements of the trust funds of the Convention (ICCD/COP(12)/7 and ICCD/COP(12)/INF.5).

Global Environment Facility

The relationships between the UNCCD and the GEF date back to the first COP. In decision 11/COP.11, the COP requested the Executive Secretary, in cooperation with the Administrator of the GEF, to propose amendments to the memorandum of understanding between the UNCCD and the GEF. The draft memorandum is contained in document ICCD/COP(12)/18. The report from the GEF on its funding of projects related to the Convention is contained in ICCD/CRIC(14)/5 (since Decision 11/COP.9, CRIC assists the COP in reviewing its partnership with the GEF).

7. That proposal is contained in paragraph 14 of document ICCD/COP(12)/4, <<http://www.unccd.int/Lists/OfficialDocuments/cop12/4fre.pdf>>.

8. <<http://www.riopavilion.org/>>.

1.3.3 Multi-year workplan, two-year costed work programme, and programme and budget

This section is a summary of the information contained in the documents prepared by the secretariat and the GM with regard to the multi-year workplan for the Convention, the two-year costed work programme of its bodies (ICCD/COP(12)/6) and the 2016-2017 program and budget (ICCD/COP(12)/5). It should be read in conjunction with documents ICCD/COP(12)/7 and ICCD/CRIC(14)/3, on the performance of the UNCCD during the last biannual exercise. In order to avoid repetition, this section only presents an outline of the issues and no figures are provided.

It should be noted that the presentation of the programme and the budget was simplified at COP 12 as compared to previous years.

Multi-year workplan and two-year costed work programme

The 2016-2019 multi-year workplan is based on the four strategic objectives of the Convention: improving the living conditions of affected populations, improving the condition of affected ecosystems, generating global benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD, and mobilizing resources to support the implementation of the Convention through building effective partnerships between national and international actors. The table it contains shows the expected results, indicators, and the 2016-2017 production schedule.

The 2016-2017 two-year costed work programme is much more detailed than the multi-year plan and focuses on the resources the secretariat and the GM require. In terms of human resources, the secretariat and GM mention that they have commitments associated with 45 posts.

Regarding the resources required by the secretariat, they are divided into five categories: Executive Direction and Management; External Relations, Policy and Advocacy; Knowledge Management, Science and Technology; Facilitation and Monitoring of Implementation; and Administrative Services.

The executive direction and management division coordinates the activities of the secretariat and of the other bodies of the UNCCD, including the New York Liaison Office, which ensures the representation of the UNCCD to the United Nations and interest groups. The secretariat proposes to increase from D-1 to D-2 the level of the post of Deputy Executive Secretary.

For the next two years, the task of the external relations, policies and promotion division will be to translate the implications of the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda and the climate commitments into possible actions for the UNCCD and its Parties. The division will also advocate that desertification and drought are factors of insecurity, and that SLM has a stabilizing effect. Its proposed budget comprises communications and support for participation of civil society.

The knowledge management, science and technology component aims during 2016-2017 to improve scientific understanding and cooperation on land degradation neutrality, to support affected country Parties, and to facilitate access to scientific knowledge and best practices.

The facilitation and monitoring of the implementation component supports the activities of the CRIC. The objectives for the next biennium are to support affected country Parties with the establishment of land degradation neutrality targets, NAP alignment and with capacity development and technical support. It also intends to develop the reporting, review and assessment procedures.

Finally, the administrative component provides management and support to the secretariat and the GM. It will continue to implement the Umoja system, an administrative reform conducted within the United Nations, and the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS).

The resources needed to GM are also divided into subcategories, which are dependent on the changing context of international funding. Recent studies have yielded some suggestions for changes to the GM approach. Three main themes have been identified for future action:

- Land degradation neutrality action: country support for LDN targets baselines and practices;
- Lands, economy and the private sector: viable investment opportunities and sustainable land-use business models;
- Lands, resilience and security: landscape restoration, drought and disasters risk reduction, human mobility and conflict prevention, and liaison with Rome.

The secretariat's conclusions and recommendations are to consider the submitted multi-year work plan and two-year costed work programme, and to review them in light of the tasks the COP mandated the secretariat, GM, CST and CRIC to perform.

Programme and budget

The COP determines the core budget and indicative scale of contributions. The scale for the period 2016-2017 was developed in accordance with decision 67/238 of the U.N. General Assembly.

Five funds contribute to the activities of the Convention: (a) The Trust Fund for the Core Budget of the UNCCD; (b) Trust Fund for Participation of Representatives of Eligible Parties in the Sessions of the UNCCD Conference; (c) Trust Fund for Voluntary Financing of Activities under the UNCCD; (d) Trust Fund for Voluntary Financing of Activities under the GM; and (e) Trust Fund for Convention Events Organized by the UNCCD secretariat (the Bonn Fund).

The secretariat also prepared contingency budgets. A budget for conference follow-up (COP, CST and CRIC), in the event that the General Assembly were to change its practice, which was until now to include this budget in the regular budget of the United Nations and the COPs. Contingency budgets are also provided in the event that COP 13, the S-5 CST and CRIC 15 are held in Bonn.

The secretariat and the GM are requested to regularly assess their operations to meet requirements of the United Nations or donors. A UNCCD Evaluation Office was established in 2014 to meet these demands. The Evaluation Office has one professional staff financed through the programme support costs. An allocation from the core budget is proposed for the recruitment of independent evaluators and the publication of evaluation results. Project-level monitoring and assessment costs are for their part included in the overall costs of each project.

Convention Trust Funds

This sub-section is based on document ICCD/COP(12)/7, which, pursuant to decision 10/COP.11, reports on the status of the Convention trust funds, including its revenues and expenses.

With regard to the Trust Fund for the Core Budget of the UNCCD, the secretariat had received 63% of expected contributions by May 31, 2015. Moreover, at the same date, expenditures had reached only 56.6% of the budget, due to special circumstances.

The disbursements from the Trust Fund for Participation of Representatives of Eligible Parties in the UNCCD in the Sessions were also lower than its revenues.

The Trust Funds for Voluntary Financing of Activities under the UNCCD received only 53% of expected funds, despite the fact that decision 10/COP.11 underlined the need for extra budgetary funding for additional activities of the secretariat and the GM. However, these figures show a marked increase over the same period in 2012-2013.

With respect to the Bonn Fund, which relies solely on funding from the government of Germany, half of the planned funding for 2014-2015 had been received by May 31, 2015, and expenses were below revenues.

Finally, the secretariat reported on the Special Account for Programme Support Costs, which was established in accordance with a practice of the United Nations, and which consists of 13% of the revenues of all funds.

Document ICCD/CRIC(14)/3, containing the report on the implementation of the four-year workplan and two-year costed work programme for 2014-2015 of the secretariat, the CRIC, the CST and the GM, should be considered when reading the document ICCD/COP(12)/7.

The Parties will also be asked to review the documents relating to the audited financial statements of the Convention trust funds for the biennia 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 (up to December 31, 2014) (ICCD/COP(12)/9 and ICCD/COP(12)/8), and the status of contributions to the funds of the Convention for the biennium 2014-2015 (ICCD/COP(12)/11). Similarly, the audited financial statements of the GM (up to September 27, 2013) are submitted to the COP in document ICCD/COP(12)/10.

1.3.4 Procedural matters

Several procedural issues are subject to the attention of COP 12: follow up of decision 26/COP.11, which requested that the list of international experts be updated (ICCD/COP(12)/13); follow up of Decision 5/COP.11 regarding civil society organisations (ICCD/COP(12)/3); follow up of Decision 31/COP.11 relating to the ad hoc group of experts (AHGE) to make recommendations on procedures and institutional mechanisms for the resolution of questions on implementation (ICCD/COP(12)/14); follow up of Decision 32/COP.11, in which the COP requested the AHGE to make recommendations concerning the annexes on arbitration and conciliation procedures (ICCD/COP(12)/14); and the request submitted by Annex V country Parties regarding the mandate and scope of the Convention (ICCD/COP(12)/16).

Rule 47 of the rules of procedure is an outstanding item. Rule 47 is dealing with the voting majority required for the adoption of decisions by the Conference has been an item on the agenda of the COP since its second session. Document ICCD/COP(12)/14 summarizes the issue concerning rule 47 of the rules of procedure dealing with the voting majority required for the adoption of decisions by the Conference. Decision 30/COP.11 called for the matter to be decided at COP 12. According to the secretariat, three options can be considered at COP 12. First, the COP can refer the matter to a future COP. Second, the COP could decide that when there is no consensus, a simple or qualified majority vote will be required. Third, it could decide to specify in Article 47 which decisions must be taken by consensus and which decisions must be taken by a majority vote.

Part 2.

Supplementary analysis of key issues

2.1 Land Degradation Neutrality

On the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification on June 17, 2015, the Secretary General of the UN, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, called for investments to be made in land degradation neutrality (LDN) in order to combat soil impoverishment and its impacts for humanity.⁹

The concept of land degradation neutrality was developed by the UNCCD secretariat in the context of the Rio+20 Summit, when it proposed the goal of “zero net rate of land degradation” in drylands.¹⁰

Until then, the UNCCD’s approach was primarily based on the concept of sustainable land management (SLM), for both prevention of land degradation and restoration. In a sense, the LDN concept sets the goal and SLM provides the means to achieve it. These two concepts are also of relevance to the other Rio conventions (see the following section on synergies).

The concept of land degradation neutrality (LDN) has attracted the attention of several international and regional organizations. The concept of neutrality in the context of environmental conservation is already well-known and applied. One example of implementation of the concept is the REDD+ initiative (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) at the international level. Examples can also be found at the national level in several countries, for example in the context of wetlands preservation.¹¹

While the LDN concept has received support from many organization, it is not unanimously endorsed.¹² For example, the Cairo Declaration on Managing

9. Secretary-General’s Message for 2015: Invest in healthy soils, online: <<http://www.un.org/en/events/desertificationday/2015/sgmessage.shtml>>.

10. Non-paper, LDNW “Land degradation neutral world”, Forum Desertif’Action, Montpellier, May 2015, <<http://desertif-actions.fr/fr/3-jours-d-ateliers#div4>>.

11. Shelley WELTON, Michela BIASUTTI and Michael B. GERRARD, “Legal and Scientific Integrity in Advancing a “Land Degradation Neutral World”, working paper published by the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, Columbia Law School, 2014, online: <https://web.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/climate-change/welton_-_land_degradation.pdf>.

12. *Id.*, at 2: the authors mention the following criticism of the concept: the means of implementation are yet to be defined, as well as ways to determine if that implementation is a success or a failure.

Africa's Natural Capital for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication, adopted in March 2015, includes a chapter on desertification, but makes no mention LDN. However, it does make a reference to LDN when referring to the monitoring of the SDGs.¹³ Civil society organizations, without rejecting the principle, voice some concerns about its implementation. For example, the declaration adopted at the end of the Désertif'Action International Forum held in Montpellier in June 2015, states:

New concepts like Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), if they are to be used by countries, international organizations or private operators, must first be at the service of local communities and prevent land grabbing, the use of GMOs or the intensive use of chemicals; this fundamental orientation should be part of the objectives and procedures of the further development of the above-mentioned concepts.¹⁴ (translation)

In September 2015, the concept of LDN was embedded into the SDGs¹⁵, and as such as become an unavoidable concept for future developments of international policies pertaining to sustainable development.

LDN's goal is to avoid the degradation of land, and that unavoidable degradation be compensated. LDN, as a concept, ensures that vital ecosystem services are preserved and the livelihoods of billions of people secured. Land restoration resulting from compensation mechanisms, can also play a role in mitigating climate change, through carbon sequestration.¹⁶

An important issue that will be discussed at the COP in Ankara is the definition of LDN in the context of the UNCCD. As mentioned in section 1.3.1, the IWG has proposed a definition of LDN, but two issues remain open for discussion: first, should the scope of LDN be all lands, or limited to arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas; second, should LDN cover all aspects of conservation, restoration and rehabilitation. It will be necessary to have a consensual definition to move forward with the implementation of the concept.

The approach that arose from Rio+20, while underlining the importance of LDN in drylands, appears to be more comprehensive and multisectoral than one developed solely for arid lands. The targets could be universal but differentiated according to regional or national contexts. The concept and definitions will have

13. *Cairo Declaration on Managing Africa's Natural Capital for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*, which doesn't mention LDN in its chapter about desertification: online, <<http://www.unep.org/roa/Portals/137/AMCEN15Docs/Cairo%20Declaration%20on%20Managing%20Africa%20Natural%20Capital.pdf>>.

14. Déclaration de Montpellier – Terres et changement climatique, online: <http://www.cari-association.org/IMG/pdf/Da15_Declaration-finale-FR.pdf>.

15. Online: <<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/09/historic-new-sustainable-development-agenda-unanimously-adopted-by-193-un-members/>>.

16. Climate change and land degradation: Bridging knowledge and stakeholders, 9-12 March 2015, Cancún, Mexico, Outcomes from the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference.

to be further elaborated with both scientific and political considerations in mind. Indeed, sound technical solutions and sustainable land management approaches alone will not be sufficient in the absence of strong political support and adequate governance.¹⁷

The concept of neutrality has already been applied to other environmental issues. The analysis of the successes and failures of these programs will be useful in determining what hurdles and opportunities can arise with the implementation of LDN.¹⁸ Some authors note that LDN is much more ambitious compared to similar approaches: LDN is not limited to a specific type of environment, but would apply to all lands (pursuant to the global approach); and, it is not limited to a single purpose, such as ecosystem services or carbon reduction, but is encompassing in terms of expected benefits (social, economic and environmental).¹⁹ Despite the complexity inherent to such a wide-ranging approach, it can be an asset in terms of financing, given that by tackling a variety of problems, multiple sources can be tapped.

In the context of the UNCCD, LDN will focus more specifically on three objectives: the reduction and prevention of degradation, the rehabilitation of partly degraded land, and the restoration of desertified land.²⁰

Once LDN is defined and its scope established, the issue is then the determination of the benchmarks and indicators. Insofar as LDN seeks to maintain or improve the current situation, it is necessary to determine how to measure it and its evolution. A baseline is necessary. This simple statement hides a complex reality: the state of desertification in the world is not yet uniformly determined.²¹ The determination of baselines is one of the problems identified in the implementation of REDD+. Concerning desertification, several measurement methods have been tried, but they are sometimes conflicting with each other.²²

There are also many issues concerning the monitoring: the phenomenon of land degradation is complex and is not fully understood at present, it is gradual, and it is highly contextual, depending on the areas where it occurs. Furthermore, monitoring must take into account the fact that degradation will likely continue

17. Non-paper, op.cit. note 10.

18. WELTON, op. cit. note 11, at 19.

19. WELTON, op. cit. note 11, at 34.

20. "Land degradation neutrality resilience at local, national and regional levels", document produced by the UNCCD secretariat, p. 12, available online at: [site Web de la CNULCD <http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Publications/V2_201309-UNCCD-BRO_WEB_final.pdf>](http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Publications/V2_201309-UNCCD-BRO_WEB_final.pdf).

21. Alan GRAINGER, "Is Land Degradation Neutrality feasible in dry areas?", in *Journal of Arid Environments* 112 (2015) 14, at 18.

22. Joachim VON BRAUN, Nicolas GERBER, Alisher MIRZABAEV, Ephraim NK-ONYA, "The economics of land degradation", Working Document n° 109, University of Bonn Centre for Development Research and International Food Policy Research Institute, at p. 7, available online at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2237977>.

for some time after counter-measures have been implemented, with positive effects only apparent later on.²³

Strategic choices in the context of the LDN implementation will depend on the causes of degradation in each circumstance.²⁴ Some are direct (e.g. poor soil management), others indirect (e.g. poverty), some are anthropogenic and other natural. All these causes intersect and interact. A range of strategies is to be considered.²⁵ Involvement of the private sector will also need to be addressed given their importance as land users.²⁶

One approach to LDN implementation consists of offset mechanisms. These mechanisms, which are occasionally qualified as “pollution permits”, are designed to allow for the replacement of an impacted ecosystem by the restoration of another ecosystem, resulting in « zero net loss ». ²⁷ Alas, in practice, compensatory ecosystems are often not the equivalent of the impacted ecosystems.²⁸ For that reason, and other, some civil society organizations oppose the establishment of ecological offset mechanisms.²⁹

Moreover, according to authors who have studied existing offset mechanisms such as the Wetlands Mitigation Banking (WMB) and REDD+, these mechanisms have their share of pitfalls. Many difficulties arise in the establishment of standardized and reliable scientific criteria for follow up, thereby making any assessment of the success or failure of programmes more difficult. Moreover, in the specific case of WMB, many equivalency issues were raised: replacement lands did not provide as many services or were not located in areas where these services had the same value as those offered by original land. A similar problem arises in the implementation of REDD+: even though emission reductions can be recorded in the more controlled areas areas, deforestation continues in less controlled areas.³⁰ This highlights the importance of carefully devising such a mechanism in the framework of LDN in order to avoid the problems existing programmes face.

23. GRAINGER, *op. cit.* note 21, at 20 and 22.

24. GRAINGER, *op. cit.* note 21, at 21.

25. VON BRAUN and al., *op. cit.*, note 22, at 8 and 17.

26. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) has published a summary document on LDN and its evolution, and the long-term benefits LDN can generate for businesses: <<http://www.wbcd.org/work-program/focus-areas/ecosystems/restoringdegradedland.aspx>>.

27. The US program is mentioned here as an example of many similar programs. This program aims to offset the loss of wetlands by restoring similar environments elsewhere. REDD + aims for its part to allow developed countries or their CO2 emitters to offset these emissions by financing the fight against deforestation in developing countries to avoid the release of the carbon stored in these forests.

28. WELTON, *op. cit.* note 11, at 41.

29. Non-paper, *op. cit.* note 10.

30. WELTON, *op. cit.* note 11, at 23, 24 and 32.

The definition of LDN currently proposed by the IWG stems from the LDN goal of maintaining or increasing the quality of land, which comprises its preservation and restoration. The proposed definition does not seem to favor preservation over restoration. Some authors note that even in the case where LDN would not include a formal offset system; it could still leave the door open to reaching neutrality through land restoration, rather than preservation. This can be an issue where restoration techniques haven't been extensively tested. Prevention still seems nowadays the safest way to maintain land quality. Furthermore, given that climate change will change the nature of many ecosystems, it will be important to take this factor into account when establishing preservation objectives and restorative measures.³¹

It will also be necessary to address the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders, from both the public and private sectors. For example, a legal obligation to restore land impacted as a result of human activity would have implications on private sector activities. In a context where, at present, no law prohibits activities impacting the land, such a measure would favour LDN. Another measure that is discussed is the creation of a labelling scheme. However, while these approaches and others may be useful in a policy toolbox, they must be well designed to avoid some of the known pitfalls. Legal obligations to restore and certification schemes have to take into account externalities. For instance, the impact of these measures on local communities has to be considered. It is therefore important to ensure the participation of all stakeholders at the various stages of the elaboration of these measures.³²

Chasek and colleagues propose, an LDN action plan that would include a scoping stage for determining the spatial extent to which LDN would be applied; a classification stage where land would be classified according to their use and condition; a normative step that would select the appropriate land management measures in the circumstances, an implementation stage and a monitoring stage.³³

Another author proposes a three-phase strategy. The first phase would focus on restoring degraded lands, improving the land use planning systems at national level, and building national and international monitoring capabilities. The second phase would consist in reducing the rate of desertification with the help of fully integrated land use planning and monitoring systems. The third phase would set a target year for achieving a LDN objective, based on the results of phases 1 and 2.³⁴

31. WELTON, *op. cit.* note 11, at 41, 42 and 45.

32. WELTON, *op. cit.* note 11, p. 47.

33. Pamela CHASEK, and al. "Operationalizing Zero Net Land Degradation: The next stage in international efforts to combat desertification?", in *Journal of Arid Environments* 112 (2015) 5.

34. GRAINGER, *op. cit.* note 21, at 22-23.

Definition, indicators, and monitoring aspects are important when establishing a legal framework, and for the financing of projects. Investors will only finance well-defined mechanisms that have strong monitoring and evaluation procedures.³⁵ Some argue that LDN could create stronger accountability in the context of the UNCCD and thereby facilitate financing.

The UNCCD secretariat has developed basic common indicators for monitoring the implementation of SDG 15, including its target 15.3, and after having presented them to the UNFCCC and CBD, it has submitted them to the United Nations Statistical Commission (ICCD/COP(12)/17 and ICCD/COP(12)/CST/3-ICCD/CRIC(14)/7)³⁶ These indicators will be discussed at COP 12.

Furthermore, the secretariat and the GM are proposing to create a fund specifically dedicated to the implementation of LDN. The proposal will be presented at COP 12. According to the summary of a recent meeting of the Groupe Travail Désertification³⁷, the fund will provide a platform linking private and public funds set up for various types of land and owners. The fund would contribute to risk management and the mobilization of public sector for capacity building. The fund will not purchase land per se, but will negotiated land management agreement with landlords through leases or concessions.³⁸

Start-up investments will come from private funds, such as pension funds and public funds, until the fund can self-finance.³⁹ Given that land rehabilitation can improve carbon storage, the fund will generate carbon credits. Through the sale of these carbon credits, the fund should be able to self-finance after 5 years. National control structures will have to be established to oversee the commercial restoration of land, in conjunction with international bodies that would ensure global consistency.⁴⁰ They should also ensure that investments are made in accordance with the well being of the communities and in an equitable manner, taking into account their aspirations and adaptation capacity.⁴¹

Some observers stress that experience demonstrates that REDD+ investments are often made in countries that are best equipped to carry out the projects, which are not necessarily those that are most in need of investments. LDN fund rules might therefore have to ensure that some investments will be channelled to countries of greatest needs. The discussions should also address the scale at which objectives and plans should be determined. The REDD+ appears to have shown some effect-

35. WELTON, *op. cit.* note 11, at 48.

36. ICCD/COP(12)/17, online: <<http://www.unccd.int/Lists/OfficialDocuments/cop12/17eng.pdf>>.

37. Online: <http://www.gtdesertification.org/IMG/pdf/GTD_-_CR_reunion_LDNF.pdf>. See also: <http://www.landscapes.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/London-white-papers/GLF_WhitePaper_LDN_Fund.pdf>.

38. *Id.*, at 3 and 4 of the pdf document.

39. *Id.*, at 4 and 5 of the pdf document.

40. Non-paper, *op. cit.* note 10.

41. Outcomes from the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference, *op. cit.* note 16.

iveness with some level of integrated governance (local and national).⁴² If this approach is adopted, it will be important to determine the roles and responsibility of the various levels involved.

The UNCCD appears to be moving towards the concept of LDN. While the concept holds many hopes, including the revitalization of the UNCCD on the international stage, its development will require due consideration of past experiences, and a solid framework to avoid the pitfalls similar approaches have been faced with.

When asked about this new concept, affected country Parties generally share this view and see the potential it bears.⁴³ Its implementation, however, requires that countries take ownership and that financial and technical resources required for its implementation be made available. Achieving neutrality is considered possible through the establishment of sound integrated management strategies involving land experts, technicians and local communities. Recommended practices should lead to improvement in the living conditions of the populations.

Each State is encouraged to set its own LDN target. For instance, India has already announced its decision to achieve land degradation neutrality by 2030, while China, without setting a deadline, says neutrality can be achieved.⁴⁴

2.2 The integration of Sustainable Development Goals and UNCCD implementation

The SDGs comprise 17 goals. Goal 15 reads:

- Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss⁴⁵.

The related targets are as follows:

- 15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements;

42. WELTON, *op. cit.* note 11, at 43-44.

43. Based on the results of a questionnaire designed by the OSS reported in the following documents “Une vision et contribution des pays de la région MENA (Afrique du Nord et Moyen Orient) à la troisième conférence scientifique de la Convention des Nations Unies sur la lutte contre la désertification”, online <<http://www.oss-online.org/sites/default/files/fichier/Consultation-MENA.pdf>>, and “Une vision et contribution sahélienne à la troisième conférence scientifique de la Convention des Nations unies sur la lutte contre la désertification Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel”, February 2015, online: <<http://www.oss-online.org/sites/default/files/projet/Consultation-Sahel.pdf>>.

44. World Business Council for Sustainable Development, http://www.wbcsdservers.org/web/org/Land_Degradation_Neutrality_Issue_Brief.pdf

45. <<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>>.

- 15.2 By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally;
- 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;
- 15.4 By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development;
- 15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species;
- 15.6 Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed;
- 15.7 Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products;
- 15.8 By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species;
- 15.9 By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts;
- 15.a Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems;
- 15.b Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation;
- 15.c Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities.⁴⁶

Target 15.3 refers to land degradation neutrality, a concept that was discussed in the previous section.

It can be noted that many targets pertain to forests, which has implications for the management of carbon stocks; that they address land degradation in the widest sense, not limiting its scope to certain types of land; and that the terms “ecosystem”, “genetic resources”, “species of flora and fauna” which relate to biodiversity, are ubiquitous. The fight against desertification and LDN are therefore linked to other issues in the context of terrestrial ecosystems preservation, restoration and management.

46. Id.

Moreover, many linkages exist between Goal 15 and other SDGs, for instance, goals 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 12 (responsible consumption and production), and 13 (climate action). Other goals, like peace, justice and strong institutions or reducing inequalities have an indirect link with land preservation.

In practical terms, the UNCCD will likely focus on the Goal 15. However, the way the SDGs are written reflects the fact that interconnections exist between them. It is therefore necessary not to address Goal 15 in a vacuum, but rather to ensure that the activities carried out in pursuit of the goals of the UNCCD (and Goal 15) also contribute to the fulfilment of the other SDGs. This requires at a minimum the avoidance of actions that would promote the achievement of Goal 15 to the detriment of others. Conversely, the UNCCD and its Parties, must be present and vigilant in all forums and processes that will address the other SDGs, so as to ensure their effort are complementary and not counter-productive regarding SDG 15.

Working on synergies between SDG 15 and the other SDGs is likely to also have a positive impact on financing, since this approach opens the door to funding sources available for the pursuit of these other goals.

2.3 Synergies among the Rio conventions

The adoption of the UNCCD Strategy in 2007 has renewed interest for the synergistic approach promoted by several articles of the three Rio conventions. While each international conventions pertaining to sustainable development have distinct goals, these are compatible. A synergistic approach allows for concerted international action and maximization of resources, both scientific and financial (see also: Box in section 1.3.1). In the UNFCCC arena, the positive impact of the fight against desertification on climate change and other international issues was first mentioned at COP 13 also in 2007.⁴⁷

Through synergies, it is possible to address specific objectives fairly accurately, while taking account of related issues. Synergistic approaches also facilitate exchange of information and of technical and scientific knowledge.⁴⁸ The concept of synergy requires that environmental issues be analysed in an integrated and thus more coherent and effective manner. Such an approach is also conducive to the generation of added value when compared to compartmentalized approaches (see also: box in section 1.3.1).⁴⁹

47. FCCC/CP/2007/6/Add.1.

48. “Rapport d’étude sur la synergie des conventions de Rio au Niger et l’amélioration du cadre d’action de leur mise en œuvre”, Conseil national de l’environnement pour le développement durable, Global Mechanism, February 2013.

49. *Id.*

Activities at the international level are more and more considered with a synergistic approach in mind, especially following the adoption of the SDGs. For example, the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, in preparation for the 48th Meeting of the Standing Committee, which took place in January 2015, stressed the importance of LDN for the conservation of wetlands.⁵⁰ Likewise, three major themes that will be discussed by the Parties at COP 12 have a synergy aspect to them: the integration of SDGs in the implementation of the UNCCD; the synergies between the UNCCD and other relevant entities; and LDN.

In the case of the UNCCD, there is no doubt that synergies are giving impetus to the fight against desertification. The UNCCD has historically suffered from a relative indifference compared to the two other Rio conventions, which were considered to address issues of a more global concern. Linking the fight against desertification and land degradation to the other global problems, which benefit from more visibility and funds, can only be beneficial to the implementation of the UNCCD.

Moreover, as Paquin and Essahli stress in an article published in *Liaison Énergie-Francophonie*, sustainable land management is *sine qua non* to sustainable development. The linkages between land management and some of the most salient challenges faced by communities abound and cannot be ignored. Land degradation is not just an environmental problem but also a development issue. This interrelationship between development and environment is patent in developing countries where livelihoods often depend on the harnessing of vulnerable and often degraded natural resources. Only integrated solutions can improve these conditions in a sustainable manner.⁵¹

Land degradation affects the provision of ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration. Indeed, the release of vegetation and soil organic carbon as a result of land degradation decreases fertility and soil productivity, and results in increased carbon in the atmosphere, thus contributing to climate change. The loss of vegetation on degraded land also alters the local microclimate by reducing humidity in the air. Moreover, carbon and loss of vegetation decreases the water retention capacity of the soil and its potential to temper the effects of droughts and floods, thereby exacerbating the negative effects of local climate change and limiting adaptation capabilities.

50. Resource Mobilization and Partnership Framework of the Ramsar Convention and an Application for IOP Status, SC48-22, online: <http://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/sc48-22_resource_mobilization_partnership_e.pdf>.

51. Marc PAQUIN and Wafa ESSHALI, “La gestion durable des terres : clé de voûte du développement durable”, in *Liaison Énergie-Francophonie*. Numéro 100. 2e trimestre 2015, pages 65 to 68, online: <<http://www.ifdd.francophonie.org/ressources/ressources-pub-desc.php?id=635>>.

Thus, sustainable land management at the local level – in particular, the management of organic matter contained in the soil - not only plays a crucial role in strengthening local capacity to adapt, but also contributes to global climate mitigation efforts. Moreover, the effects of climate change and land degradation on biodiversity loss can exacerbate land degradation and compromise ecosystems and the services they provide, thereby further limiting the capacity to adapt to climate change.⁵²

The question of synergy between the UNCCD and the UNFCCC and CBD was often debated within the UNCCD. Synergies are to be considered in the context of NAP alignment to The Strategy. Also, the GM has conducted studies on SLM financing opportunities related to climate change.

Thus, while the benefits of UNCCD implementation in synergy with other conventions are well established, and affected country Parties have already undertaken the implementation synergistic approaches in the field, additional efforts are still needed to maximize these benefits.

The third scientific conference of the UNCCD addressed this issue and produced a number of recommendations to promote the synergy of actions pertaining to land degradation, climate change adaptation and mitigation and biodiversity conservation:

- Foster exchanges and coordination among stakeholders involved in the implementation of the three Rio conventions, at all levels: National Focal Points, government agencies, local authorities, civil society organizations;
- Develop a common framework assessment across the three Rio conventions, based on existing indicators, in order to facilitate a more balanced monitoring of multiple ecosystem services and to provide insight into the multiple benefits of sustainable land management;⁵³
- Create links and synergies within National Action Plans implemented at country level in the framework of each of the conventions;
- Implement projects on the ground that simultaneously address issues raised by the three conventions.⁵⁴

52. Outcomes from the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference, op. cit. note 16.

53. In this regard, the secretariat proposes that the Parties adopt all three indicators mentioned above.

54. Outcomes from the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference, op. cit. note 16, p. 28.

2.4 Conclusion

The three key issues addressed in this part already have, to varying degrees, been the subject of work by the COP, other bodies of the UNCCD and other international institutions. They are interrelated, and also bind the UNCCD with several other institutions, conventions and tools for sustainable development. They participate in the inclusive approach that now guides the action of the international community in tackling development issues. Their implementation still raises many questions, but these approaches take us a step closer to UNCCD objectives and sustainable development.



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This summary is intended for policymakers attending the Twelfth Conference of the Parties (COP 12) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which runs from October 12 to 22, 2015 in Ankara, Turkey.

The first pages contain a summary table of the main issues to be discussed at the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12), the fourteenth meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 14), and the twelfth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 12). Then, Part 1 succinctly describes those issues.

Part 2 presents a supplementary analysis of three key topics that will be discussed during the meetings: a) land degradation neutrality; b) the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNCCD and c) synergies between the Rio conventions.



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