

## **Management response:**

### **Independent evaluation of the project “Towards achieving Land Degradation Neutrality: turning the concept into practice”**

#### **Overview**

The evaluation looks at the land degradation neutrality (LDN) target setting pilot project at various stages: the project design, delivery, outputs and outcomes. Instead of making general statements of the success of the project in terms of the evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability and, where feasible, impact), it provides a more detailed analysis of where progress was made and how, and what were the key factors to such progress or lack of it. This is an important and fruitful approach for the evaluation report, as its main purpose is to support the development of a new program for setting voluntary LDN targets in a larger group of countries, and the selected approach enables targeted improvements to the design of this program.

The evaluation report discusses the successes and challenges faced in carrying out the pilot project, with particular attention to experiences of the stakeholders in the 14 participating countries. It identifies those activities within the project that were the most problematic ones for the participating countries, and proposes increased attention to these activities in the forthcoming LDN target setting program.

The report analyses the achievement of the planned outcomes also by reflecting the progress made against the ongoing deliberations and focus areas concerning the UNCCD both at the global intergovernmental level (the COP decision-making on LDN) and at the national level (supporting the NAP, advancing political commitment). This analysis clarifies the positioning, and potential, of applying the LDN concept in defining concrete measures to address land degradation at various levels.

The secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) welcome the findings and recommendations as valuable guidance to the development of the LDN target setting program, and commit to carrying out many of the improvements presented in the recommendations.

#### **Recommendations**

**Evaluation recommendation 1. *In a new phase of the project, more time should be reserved for (i) the initial stage of guiding participants in the use and analysis of data provided centrally; (ii) a period of iterative exchange between those holding national and global datasets to identify the best mix of sources to use in each case; and (iii) a moment of quality control to test the plans tabled for their strength of evidence base and the realism of their targets***

Management response: Accepted. On (i), in the next few months the methodology and the use of global/national datasets will be further defined, and the results of this work will support the upcoming LDN target setting program. In addition to conceptual and methodological clarification and guidelines, also practical training on the LDN target setting, including related monitoring, reporting

and verification, is planned to be developed. On (ii), technical support will be provided to countries as part of the LDN target setting program. Together (i) and (ii) are expected to considerably reduce the data-use and data-analysis related challenges that were faced in the pilot project.

With regard to (iii), the 'proof' of quality is essentially in checking whether or not those countries that have set the LDN targets are making progress toward meeting them. This will be done through the periodic UNCCD national reporting that reviews and assesses progress, building on the defined data and agreed indicators.

**Evaluation recommendation 2. *Other states should be encouraged to test the IPCC methodology for deriving SOC stock and a central repository maintained of different countries' experience to build practice to a high common denominator.***

Management response: Partially accepted. Testing the IPCC methodology requires resources and capacities that were not available for most of the pilot countries, and the extent to which such resources and capacities will be secured for the upcoming projects is yet to be seen. This is nevertheless considered as an important matter for linking the LDN target with activities on climate change, and within the limit of available resources, the secretariat and the GM will work toward enabling further knowledge of this methodology and its use.

On supporting information-sharing of different countries' experience, a user-friendly, interactive online communication platform is planned to be established for the upcoming LDN target setting program.

**Evaluation recommendation 3. *CSO and beneficiary consultation should be central to the design and delivery of pilot interventions. Connections should be made to broader efforts to engage CSOs in cultivating political support for LDN / Convention implementation***

Management response: Accepted. Setting the LDN target is a governmental responsibility, and accordingly governmental representatives, notably the UNCCD focal point, will continue to be the key stakeholder in the upcoming LDN target setting program. At the same time, the importance of involving better other stakeholders, particularly the civil society and the private sector, is recognized. The participating countries will be assisted to arrange a consultative, participatory approach in the upcoming LDN target setting program. This is planned to include multi-stakeholder LDN working groups and the organization of LDN training and awareness raising for also non-governmental participants, if resources are available.

**Evaluation recommendation 4. *As appropriate, further analysis should be conducted to tighten the evidence base for the plans developed by participants in the current project. The targets set should be subject to further review to provide assurance that they are realistic for anticipated levels of available resources.***

Management response: Partially accepted. Cooperation with the pilot countries will continue, as most of them are yet to finalize the target setting plan. Their experiences and lessons learned from "pioneering" the LDN approaches will be made available to other countries through an online platform. For further development of the pilot countries' LDN target plans, the secretariat and the GM will be ready to provide advice on methodological and conceptual questions that the countries may have, but the responsibility for implementing activities to reach the LDN target will be with the

countries themselves. While the secretariat and the GM will assist in the mobilization of resources for implementation, it is recognized that the LDN targets are supposed to be highly relevant nationally, and technically feasible.

Please see also response to recommendation 1(iii).

**Evaluation recommendation 5. *Any sense of dependency on the Project Manager and national consultants should be reduced by putting stronger emphasis on institutionalizing national capacity to work on LDN and on fostering relationships between participating countries. As part of this, there may be value in exploring whether participants in this project would be willing to 'buddy up' with states joining the second round – to offer advice and help to resolve issues which they themselves have now worked through.***

Management response: Partially accepted. In the target-setting phase, as the LDN concept is being introduced to the country level processes, the project manager and the national consultant will have an active guiding role, for obvious reasons. As the work proceeds, their role will become less important. One key aim of the upcoming LDN target setting program is to build the capacity of the national focal point institutions and selected other governmental and non-governmental representatives that will have an important role in advancing LDN. The training will support these stakeholders to continue the LDN process through implementation after the target-setting phase.

The pilot countries' experiences and lessons learned will be made available to other countries through an online platform.

**Evaluation recommendation 6. *Space should be reserved for reflection, perhaps one year on from COP Decision, to review whether LDN appears to be fulfilling its potential as the key that unlocks the door to serious commitment to implement the Convention.***

Management response: Partially accepted. While the approaches and monitoring concerning LDN may evolve as more experiences and information becomes available, the LDN target itself has been set to be maintained until 2030 as part of the sustainable development goals and their targets.

The achievements linked with LDN will be reported and assessed not only by the UNCCD but also under the UN General Assembly, as part of the process to follow-up the sustainable development goals / target 15.3.