



**Keynote Address of Monique Barbut
UNCCD Executive Secretary
At the Global Landscape Forum
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“Governance for Land Degradation Neutrality and Landscape Restoration”

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Friends and Colleagues

It is indeed an honor to open this Forum. We are grateful to BMZ and the Government of Germany for supporting the work of CIFOR and for bringing the GLF here to Bonn.

If you think about the sheer scale of the transformation mankind has imposed on the land - over the last couple of centuries - it is simply breathtaking and alarming.

Over the last two decades alone, 20 to 30 per cent of the Earth’s vegetated surface has experienced persistent declining trends in productivity. That is mainly as a result of land and water use and management practices.



This despite the fact that most of the resources, which we depend on as a species come from the Earth. More than 99 percent of the calories we consume, for example. So what we are doing to the land - is like a slow motion suicide.

James Garfield, the 19th Century US President, stated that "*suicide is not a remedy*". To step away from the edge; we need to turn these trends on their head.

The "integrated landscape approach" on its own will not be enough. In fact, I should say - I am not a big fan of the term "landscape approach" at all. It is ambitious, yes. But it fails to convey our common vision to the outside world. Decision-makers for example just don't get it. It doesn't translate well into other languages either.

But perhaps more importantly, it tends to overlook small-scale farmers. These small scale producers are the true essence of rural communities. They have been the backbone of food production for millennia. Their lives



and livelihoods cannot be traded away. That is no remedy either. They must be protected.

So what, then, can turn the trends and transformation on its head?

Well we need a clear, measurable and impactful target. We need to communicate it more convincingly to the outside world. And we need a way to govern our relationship with the land so that no one is left behind.

And to my mind, the work the UNCCD is currently doing can help do just that.

Under Sustainable Development Goal 15, the international community has formulated an ambitious vision for the land management of the future: a land degradation neutral world in 2030.

We can achieve so called Land Degradation Neutrality or LDN by conserving the land we have - avoiding the degradation of new land and managing land sustainably. At the same time, restoring the land we have already degraded.

LDN targets are currently being set at the national level – with 114 countries already committed. In fact more than 70 have set their baselines using UNCCD's land-based indicators. Interestingly, these same data sets are also



being used for the SDG indicator itself. This will be the first time we will have comprehensive land degradation estimates that are validated by countries.

Done right, the potential of LDN, particular in terms of rehabilitation - is huge.

But recognizing we can't do everything everywhere, we have to target our efforts.

We can focus LDN on the 75 per cent of the world's poorest people. For most, land is their only tangible asset. And fully 1.3 billion people are trapped on degrading agricultural land. LDN is the best chance we have to build a sustainable future.

And it works.

More than one million hectares of degraded agricultural and forest land has been restored in East and Central Tigray – in Ethiopia -alone. The knock on effects gave women a prominent role; encouraged children to attend school; improved social cohesion; and reduced migration levels.

It works to the extent that the private sector is finally taking notice.



At the One Planet (climate) summit in Paris last week, the LDN Fund, an initiative promoted by UNCCD and managed by private sector to invest in the rehabilitation of land was recognized as one of 12 emerging ways to deliver sustainable development and fight climate change – at the same time.

But to be clear; neither the UN nor the private sector see LDN as just another target.

It is more of an operational framework for an entirely new land agenda.

Many elements of this agenda are detailed in our publication, the **Global Land Outlook**.

To be successful, LDN and the broader new land agenda has to be based on a revolution in how we govern the land. It needs an approach based on **rights, rewards, and responsibility**.

In terms of rights...there are two pressing elements.

- **Land tenure and resource rights** allow smallholders to plan for the future and pass down their hard-won livelihoods to the next generation. Overall, in Africa, only about 10 per cent of rural land is



registered, leaving 90 per cent vulnerable. Of course, there are other institutional barriers that obstruct progress on the ground – especially emerging issues like land grabbing. But to be clear, without secure access to land resources the uptake of SLM practices and restoration will not accelerate as fast or spread as widely as we need.

- At the same time, **gender inequality** -- whether in terms of land tenure, access to credit and technology, legal rights or inheritance – discourages the participation of women in land management activities. Closing the gender gap in the use of inputs and technologies could increase yields for women farmers by 20 to 30 per cent -- and raise total agricultural output in developing countries by up to 4 per cent.

In terms of rewards...

- The stewards of the land need to be compensated for safeguarding the good functioning of the land. After all, our collective food security and economic growth depends on this natural capital. Incentives, in the form of payments for services, insurance schemes or the creation



of stronger value chains would help shift the market towards more sustainable production.

In terms of responsibility...

- Land use planning is about doing the right thing in the right place at the right scale. So finally, without a sense of responsibility for preserving the diverse functions of the land, management decisions will always favor the lowest common denominator. Responsibility means long-term thinking and planning for the future – it means cooperation and working together to optimize mutual outcomes. It is a collective responsibility – of consumers, producers and everyone in between. Governments at all scales can play a role.

Moving forward, we need to work collectively to make a revolution in land governance a reality.

But as Alexis de Tocqueville, the French writer and historian of revolutions noted *"In a revolution, as in a novel, the most difficult part to invent is the end"*.



But I am convinced. And I hope you are too. If we get an equitable balance between rights, rewards and responsibility. If we are able to achieve LDN. We would reduce emissions, save biodiversity, and improve the human condition. This would, in turn, halt and turn the transformations of the last century on its head. A revolutionary idea. That could end centuries of collective destruction.

Thank you.