

Business Declaration on land degradation neutrality



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Introduction



The thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties sets a Strategic policy Framework to guide on ground actions under the Convention from 2018-2030 to help its member nations achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). The SDG 15.3, which aims at achieving a land degradation-neutral world by 2030, constitutes a critical milestone in the international community's acknowledgement of the importance of land degradation neutrality.

While policies are being shaped and strengthened, business contribution to help governments achieve LDN target is also being recognized and welcomed in Ordos.

In Ankara, at the 12th Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification (12-23 October 2015) a breakthrough agreement was reached, with country parties committing to ensure that the amount of healthy and productive land may stay stable starting in 2030. The parties also agreed on the indicators they will use not only to measure progress, but to also strengthen measures to make the land resilient to climate change and to halt the biodiversity loss that follows the destruction of ecosystems.

Since 2015, the country parties and the UNCCD secretariat have worked to start implementation of the land degradation neutrality target. Up to now more than 101 countries have committed to formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN according to their specific national circumstances and development priorities. The Secretariat and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD have launched the LDN Target Setting Programme (TSP) which is supporting interested countries in the national target setting process, including in the definition of national baselines, targets and associated measures to achieve LDN by 2030. Synergies are also sought among the three Rio Conventions – desertification, climate change and biodiversity to address challenges on many fronts; food, energy, water, climate, biodiversity, jobs, migration and security.

For businesses, land degradation can translate into losses through decline in availability and quality of raw materials and higher cost of restoration. It can also increase risks related to market access. Hence, coordinated efforts of multiple actors are required to halt and reverse land degradation, restore degraded ecosystems and manage land resources sustainably. It is being recognized that the right institutional, political and legal frameworks accompanied by economic incentives can allow the global community to achieve LDN. While participation of all stakeholders is

critical to success, the private sector has the resources and technological know-how that is needed for large-scale investments and concrete action on the ground. By bringing innovative solutions, business can significantly contribute to the transformation of our economies to become land degradation neutral.

The Business Forum declaration in Ankara concluded:

“Tackling the land degradation challenge requires unprecedented collaboration between all stakeholders – business, governments and society. This declaration is an initial step towards implementing land degradation neutrality and needs to be supported by real action on the ground by all parties. In the light of the points outlined above, we call on all companies to join us in our collaborative effort to implement sustainable land management practices and land restoration. Our next steps will be critical in materializing the transition to a sustainable global economy.”

Contribution of the business sector to LDN

Land degradation threatens the important goods and services that healthy ecosystems provide, such as fertile soils, clean water, biodiversity as well as the storage of carbon.



As a result, livelihoods, food security, and economic development of rural communities are increasingly compromised. Climate change can also exacerbate stress on degraded ecosystems, further reducing land productivity for crops and livestock,

increasing water shortages, and releasing more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Climate Smart Agriculture carry a significant potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while still helping meet food, feed, fiber and fuel security objectives. Improving the efficiency and productivity of food production systems through better management practices and improved input technologies can go a long way to reducing emissions.

FAO coined the Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) as an approach that could help agriculture contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, the approach could be adopted to other land use sectors, such as forestry, mining and extractives. CSA emphasizes accounting for climatic risks that land users are facing now. New climate risks, require changes in technologies and approaches to improve the lives of those still locked in food insecurity and poverty and to

prevent the loss of gains. Therefore, in order to make significant contributions to CSA approach actions both on-farm and beyond the farm, and incorporates technologies, understand, awareness raising, institutions and investments are required.

This declaration makes a call to action from business side in two key areas of CSA, specifically addressing land degradation: sustainable soil management and landscape connectivity conservation. Both these elements are explained in detail below. Aim is to provide an easily accessible and readily understandable reference to a wide range of stakeholders, the potential target audience of this declaration includes: UNCCD member nations, farmers, pastoralists, forest and land managers, extension services and agricultural advisors, development partners, civil society, private sector and, academia, etc.

¹ Approximately 95% of global food is produced in soil
² Soil is the world's largest terrestrial pool of carbon



Contribution of the business sector to LDN *continued*

Sustainable Soil Management (SSM)

Soils are an essential and non-renewable natural resource hosting goods and services vital to ecosystems and human life. Soils are fundamental for producing crops¹, feed, fibre, fuel, and they filter, clean and regulate water. As a major storehouse for carbon², soils also help regulate emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which is fundamental for regulating climate. However, UNCCD estimates that around 52% of global soils are moderately or highly degraded i.e. due to unsustainable management practices, significantly reducing soil's ability to store and cycle carbon, nutrients, and water.



Sustainable soil management is the way forward to address land degradation and forms a basis for addressing poverty eradication, agricultural and rural development, promoting food security and improving nutrition. SSM is a valuable tool for climate change adaptation and a pathway for safeguarding key ecosystem services and biodiversity. Widespread adoption of SSM practices generates multiple socioeconomic benefits, especially for smallholder farmers and large scale agricultural producers worldwide whose livelihoods directly depend on their soil resources.

Hence, soil management is sustainable if the balance between the supporting and provisioning services for plant production and the regulating services the soil provides for water quality and availability and for atmospheric greenhouse gas composition is a particular concern.

The pathways of action for achieving LDN by minimizing land degradation is to progressively adopt SSM practices and avoid further ecosystem conversion. For many stakeholders achieving LDN may require a paradigm shift in land stewardship from 'degrade-abandon-migrate' to 'restore-sustain-protect'. At a broader context, we need to focus at following two areas requiring actions both on-farm and beyond-farm; incorporating technologies, practices that will deliver change on ground, raise awareness amongst consumers, institutions and investors on right choices:

Restoring degraded and abandoned production lands, and degraded natural and semi-natural ecosystems that provide vital, albeit indirect, benefits to business, people and working landscapes.³

Adopting Climate Smart Agricultural practices (see appendix) that progressively improve soil quality and minimize soil contamination. In brief, CSA focuses on three key areas⁴:

- Sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes;
- Adapting and building resilience to climate change;
- Reducing and/or removing greenhouse gases emissions, in a way compatible to feeding a growing population.

This would entail the involvement of multiple actors taking actions. To facilitate actor-wise actions the following suggestions are made:

- **Governments** could establish policy pathways to promote SSM practices. For instance LDN-related targets could reflect these pathways, for instance by measuring the increase in area under conservation agriculture or agroforestry within their holdings or concessions, or how much area has been set aside as buffer zones or conservation area and thus what has been the increase in ecosystem service delivery. This will largely benefit small-scale farmers and other small and medium sized operators which otherwise may have difficulties engaging in LDN.
- **Private sector enterprises** involved in soil management are invited to promote the use of the SSM with a focus on managing risks to maximize positive and minimize negative impacts on SSM, relevant to their context and circumstances,
- **Civil society organizations** with relevance to soil management are invited to integrate the SSM practices in their policies and programmes, and assist with building capacity of their members with the aim of contributing to SSM, and
- **Research organizations, universities, academia, extension organizations** and/or programmes are invited to promote integration of SSM in their own policies, and facilitate knowledge exchange and skills development to contribute to SSM.

³ UNCCD (2014). Land Degradation Neutrality. Resilience and local, national and regional levels

⁴ Adapted from WBCSD CSA program

Landscape Connectivity

Landscape connectivity, or the 'degree to which the landscape facilitates or impedes movement among resource patches' via complex and non-linear spatial distributions, could help halt the biodiversity decline by promoting improved foraging, breeding and migration routes. Species may better weather climate change if they are able to move to more suitable areas. Moreover, it can help rehabilitate degraded land and nurture the biological flows and structures needed to increase our resilience in the face of drought and other climate impacts. At the same time, adopting and scaling up SLM practices that increase landscape productivity and deliver real land stewardship by the private sector offers the prospect of significant long-term returns.

This is critical: creating landscapes with healthy, functioning ecosystems is not only key to making progress towards the environmental targets embedded in the SDGs, but also to sharpen our focus on and commitment to the triple bottom line: people, planet and profit.

Connectivity is therefore an important element of ecosystem health and biodiversity, particularly because it ensures that the species providing ecosystem services can move to the locations that need them. However, it requires involvement of and actions from multiple stakeholders. Creating multi-stakeholder platforms by calling on the involvement of a range of stakeholders and including expertise from all sectors in the planning, implementing and monitoring phases of multifunctional landscape creation is a necessary starting point. Collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential to coordinating approaches to landscape connectivity, aligning stakeholder actions and providing economic value. Indeed, involvement of private industry can also promote collaboration among stakeholders by considering competition and interdependencies among land users, and help manage incentives including certification programs.

To promote landscape connectivity conservation this declaration proposes a potential way of working together and three key approaches to doing so:

Using marginal land in rural and industrial areas - This is the biggest opportunity to enhance biodiversity in agricultural landscapes. Multifunctional field margins can significantly improve agricultural practices by supporting pollinators, pest management, soil and water conservation, and overall ecosystem resilience.

Implementing, supporting and developing incentives for spatial planning - Policies and plans for urban and rural development or restoration of degraded land need to integrate spatial planning.

Introducing green infrastructure in and around urban areas - This is an opportunity for manufacturers, retailers, and processors to benefit from 'green urban planning' and achieve lower operating costs, higher building value and lower lifetime costs. The creation of green buildings can provide long-term competitive advantage and improve brand image.



Opportunities and bottlenecks in financing private LDN projects

Scaling-up investment in SSM and landscape connectivity

- Actions are required to improve the policy environment and international mechanisms to support adoption of SSM practices
- Ensure that existing or new and relevant donor and climate finance mechanisms build in strong scope to engage and partner with the private sector in implementing their activities
- Provide better legal recognition and protection of local and customary land rights, to enable them to be recognized and accounted for by financial institutions in their lending policies.

Work to amend land tenure laws to include explicit guarantees for women to own land in their own right, for women and men to have equal rights to inherit land and for joint-titling

- Support crop insurance programmes that encourage investment in SSM technologies that improve yields and resiliency, reduce post-harvest losses and/or reduce net GHG emissions.
- Support for multi-stakeholder platforms (implementation of SDG 17) to develop, deploy and converge technologies for SSM.
- Acknowledge business efforts and develop a clear framework conducive to converging investments to help achieve LDN target.

Conclusion and Next steps

Critical next steps involve raising awareness of the importance of sustainable land management and landscape connectivity conservation, and promote the use of this paper as a reference point for motivating joint work. The aim is to encourage more multi-stakeholder partnerships to implement and report on a variety of initiatives and to make their achievements more visible. The focus is on the implementation of simple and workable solutions to jointly address land degradation, restore degraded ecosystems and manage land resources sustainably for multiple benefits.

Appendix

Table 1:
Climate Smart Agriculture practices

CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE PRACTICES	BENEFITS
<p>CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced soil disturbance • Crop rotation • Permanent ground cover 	<p>Helps improve soil health and fertility over a long period of time.</p>
<p>Soil nutrient management</p>	<p>Helps actively manage soil organic carbon levels, and optimize GHG emissions resulting from fertilizer use.</p>
<p>Water management</p>	<p>Improved water retaining/holding capacity of the soil. Water use management offers opportunities for the mitigation of methane emissions from rice cultivation.</p>
<p>Controlled farm machinery traffic</p>	<p>Helps in preventing soil compaction on a larger area of the field and as such improves the water holding capacity of the soil and reduces fossil fuel emissions.</p>
<p>Multi-Functional Field Margins (MFFMs) and landscape connectivity</p>	<p>Reduction of chemical and nutrient runoff into adjacent surface water bodies by preventing soil erosion and by supporting the development of multifunctional landscapes that offer multiple ecosystem services (migrating corridors, wind breakers for crops, water regulation).</p>
<p>Agro-Forestry</p>	<p>Ensures food, feed, fiber, and wood supply from the same area of land by combining the production of crops or pastures, and trees.</p>
<p>Water bodies and wetland conservation</p>	<p>Enhanced biodiversity and reduction of methane emissions</p>

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