

Scaling up Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting

From Lessons to Actions:
14 Pilot Countries' Experiences



Foreword



Global warming, climate change, desertification, land degradation and drought are amongst the most significant issues of our time. These are the problems that threaten not only the environment, but also our economy, security, development, food supply and social life. As the population increases day by day, the question of how to meet the unprecedented food and water demand with the limited, degrading, and decreasing resources becomes more vital. Given that an annual average of 12 million hectares of fertile land today is still subject to degradation, it is absolutely imperative to take due precautions in order to halt and reverse this situation.

During the “Sustainable Development Summit” held in New York on 25 September 2015, the UN Member States agreed to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030. Among those goals, SDG target 15.3 requires ensuring effectiveness to combat desertification and thus achieving a Land Degradation Neutral world by 2030. While it may seem difficult to halt and reverse the land degradation, to balance national and global net total of degraded areas with improved and restored lands, it is not, in fact, impossible to achieve a Land Degradation Neutral World by means of planned and effective actions.

In addition, Land Degradation Neutrality actions and activities play an essential role for a land-based approach to climate change adaptation. Both improvements to land-based activities, which are the source of 24% of carbon emissions, and actions for forests, as one of the most important carbon sinks, will obviously result in direct contributions to ensuring a carbon cycle balance.

In line with the decisions of the Twelfth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), hosted by Turkey in October 2015, to date, 100 countries have declared their willingness to set their national LDN targets under the guidance of UNCCD. Within this context, the UNCCD helps countries in developing partnerships and provides guidance for LDN target setting. Additionally, the UNCCD maintains its contribution and assistance to the developing countries for setting and achieving their LDN targets.

Supporting the process through the Ankara Initiative launched for making contributions to LDN targets, Turkey considers the presidency of UNCCD COP 12 a valuable opportunity to promote the global efforts in setting and achieving national LDN targets.

COP PRESIDENT

Prof. Dr. Veysel Eroğlu

President of UNCCD COP 12

Minister of Forestry and Water Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

Foreword



In the past, when we spoke about desertification and land degradation, there was always a pervading sense of desperation. We envisioned a slow, creeping but continual loss of land over time. It appeared to be a process that was bigger than us, beyond our control. Not any more. We are beginning to see that with vision and bold action at the local and national levels, we can change the way we interact with nature. When we achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN), we can stabilize our natural resource base. We can revitalize landscapes and in doing so, entire communities.

Early in 2015, even before the global agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a number of UNCCD country Parties embarked on a pilot project to explore how our LDN concept could be put into practice. The plan was to see how a voluntary LDN target, if developed and delivered, could underpin a number of SDGs and deliver practical, tangible results on the ground in terms of food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and biodiversity conservation. Fourteen countries, from all regions, in different ecological and socio-economic conditions, were at the forefront of this exciting experiment.

Some of the biggest lessons learned from the pilot and the recommendations for the UN SDG process are showcased in this publication. We found that land degradation is a universal problem. It takes a variety of forms and affects communities and ecosystems differently in different climatic zones. But with the right combination of management options, remarkable results are within our reach. The simple fact is that by removing barriers and providing the right incentives and promoting good practices, the extent and rate of further land degradation can be rapidly reduced without jeopardizing food availability. Taking this a step further and moving systematically towards sustainable landscapes

and land management practices, and massively scaling up rehabilitation of degraded land in a cost-effective manner, Parties can accelerate and amplify the implementation of a range of sustainable development goals.

LDN voluntary targets are a way for UNCCD Parties and local communities to be explicit about their ambitions. LDN is a cost effective investment. If achieved, it would help deliver sustainable agricultural production and greater food, energy and water security. It would help achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, through secure legal access to the land they work and manage. It would help bring people out of poverty and build the resilience of the poorest citizens to climate change. By managing land well, levels of environmental migration and conflict over natural resources, in particular, would decline. Green jobs would be created for a growing global population.

To achieve the sustainable growth we envisage through LDN, a bold vision and strong leadership are needed at the local community and national levels. Our collective challenge is to turn these LDN targets into projects that can transform our relationship with the land and inspire communities.

I invite Parties and other interested stakeholders to rally around the LDN agenda.



Monique Barbut
Executive Secretary

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Five key lessons to turn the LDN target setting concept into practice

In 2014/15, the LDN Pilot Project assisted 14 country Parties affected by desertification, land degradation and drought to implement the Land Degradation Neutrality target setting approach. The Pilot was designed to:

- Identify and test relevant indicators for planning and monitoring LDN;
- Formulate LDN national voluntary targets and associated measures based on the identified indicators, namely, land cover and land cover change; land productivity; Soil Organic Carbon; and
- Integrate, whenever possible, the selected targets into national sustainable development policies, including the National Action Programmes (NAPs) under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and other relevant investment plans.

This review of the pilot project was conducted with a view to evaluating the achievements and lessons on key topics in order to feed the LDN target setting process into a larger number of countries.

The pilot countries' national reports, the stocktaking exercise conducted by the pilot countries at the Twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD (COP 12) and the Independent Evaluation Report for the Pilot Project were analyzed to distil real experiences, relevant lessons and key takeaways for countries wishing to join the process of setting LDN targets. UNCCD National Focal Points, members of the national LDN teams, the UNCCD Secretariat and Global Mechanism were involved in this exercise.

Each lesson is based on the acquired knowledge and collaboration among the UNCCD, international partners and the 14 pilot countries. The lessons portrayed are not theoretical but built on countries' real cases and partners' experiences. They are structured in a cascading format, starting with one key message for each lesson, expanded into more detailed "takeaways", illustrated with relevant case studies at the country level.

The top lessons learned are an abridged summary of the pilot project findings, providing easier access to practical solutions by decision makers, country stakeholders and development partners interested in engaging in the LDN target setting process.

Five key lessons to turn the LDN target setting concept into practice

LESSON 1: Fostering LDN country ownership and stakeholder involvement



Setting LDN targets provided direction for ensuring high-level Government leadership. LDN targets made the objective of halting and reversing land degradation more tangible and easier to communicate to key national and international players. Country participants reported that it is becoming easier to engage their governments, the private sector, civil society and the scientific community because of the increasing recognition that LDN has acquired (through the SDG 15, target 15.3) as a global target.

LESSON 2: Defining the LDN baseline, trends and drivers of land degradation



All countries were able to establish LDN baselines based on a small set of indicators and using their national data and/or the global default data provided by the project. Upfront technical assistance and country-tailored advisory services proved relevant for overcoming data analysis challenges and barriers. The close cooperation between the data providers and the country experts facilitated the interpretation of the data used to set the LDN baselines. This collaboration encouraged countries to adopt more ambitious LDN targets.

LESSON 3: Setting LDN targets and associated measures



Understanding the importance and value of setting a target was pivotal to making this happen. Most pilot countries were able to set preliminary targets endorsed by the government, communicate and disseminate them openly and transparently at the national and international levels. The pilot countries will keep fine-tuning their targets as their capacities increase and their understanding of the LDN process evolves.

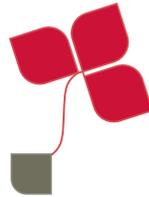
LESSON 4: Integrating LDN into national development priorities and commitments



The LDN target setting pilot project made the case for the cross-sectoral benefits of LDN as an accelerator of the Sustainable Development Goals. The importance of LDN target setting as a lens to ensure policy coherence among existing sustainable development national processes was confirmed by the pilot countries. Whenever possible, countries integrated LDN into their UNCCD National Action Programmes, and in some cases were able to integrate LDN into other relevant policies such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and land-related legislation.

LESSON 5:

Leveraging LDN



The target setting exercise, including the identification of measures, provided a clear snapshot of the substantial opportunities that the LDN target setting process brings, even though LDN implementation was outside the scope of the pilot project. Some of the pilot countries identified legal instruments that will enable LDN targets and associated measures to be achieved. Some went further, and have established legal mandates enabling the implementation of LDN. Others focused on tapping into the growing financing opportunities by pre-identifying potential financial resources for achieving LDN.



“One of the most rewarding experiences for me as LDN pilot project manager was to create the conditions for and witness the emergence of a collective expression of common lessons learned by the 14 participating countries from around the globe, from the tropics to the cold north; industrialized or more agrarian; some with huge deserts and others with immense rainforests. It was at the very final stage of the pilot project process, when the 14 country Parties met in Ankara for COP 12 of the UNCCD that the power of LDN as a revolutionary concept emerged as evidence! The energy that came from these 14 pioneer nations speaking as a collective voice created the impulse that brought COP 12 to make historical decisions, restoring the central value of land capital to achieve sustainable development.”

Alain Retière
Pilot Project Manager



An aerial photograph of a terraced rice field. The terraces are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with rows of rice plants in various stages of growth. A small, traditional wooden house with a thatched roof is situated in the center of the field. The overall scene is a mix of brown, green, and grey tones, representing the natural and cultivated landscape.

LESSON 1: Fostering LDN country ownership and stakeholder involvement

LDN targets made the objective of halting and reversing land degradation more tangible and easier to communicate to key national and international players



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“Namibia has completed its national LDN target setting process and is therefore ready to explore all available resources to help achieve the goals set.”

Mr. Pohamba Shifeta
Minister of Environment and Tourism
Government of Namibia

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LESSON 1: Fostering LDN country ownership and stakeholder involvement

Key lesson

Setting LDN targets provided direction for ensuring high level Government Leadership. LDN targets are making the objective of halting and reversing land degradation more tangible and easier to communicate to key national and international players. The LDN pilot project has provided the context for setting a target and moving UNCCD objectives forward. The common approach to the project has facilitated communication on LDN because all the project outcomes use the same language and point in the same direction. Country participants have reported that it is becoming easier to engage their governments, the private sector, civil society and the scientific community because of the increasing recognition that LDN - through the SDG 15, target 15.3 - has acquired as a global target.

Key takeaways

- Using existing institutional arrangements for LDN-related issues rather than creating new consultation bodies proved effective for most countries. They included LDN target setting discussions on the agendas of existing national UNCCD working groups and/or other consultation bodies dealing with natural resources.
- National LDN working groups fostered effective coordination across multiple sectors, under government leadership. The experience of the pilot countries suggests that the working group should meet at least twice per year with the sole purpose of reviewing the LDN target setting process.
- While the leadership of cross-sector ministries such as Finance or Planning would be optimal for the LDN target setting process, in most cases, the LDN national consultations for the pilot countries were successfully led by the Ministries of Agriculture, Forests and Environment. LDN has contributed, notably, to convincing key ministries with strategic purviews such as finance, energy and mining to change their vision of the importance of land. Since LDN is a new concept, it is up to the countries to decide at what stage in the target setting process it should be brought to the Ministries of Finance and Planning.

Country case studies

Making the case for LDN

In **Chile**, severe drought has been a major driver of voluntary participation in the Land Degradation Neutrality Pilot Project. The country is now galvanizing political support towards establishing ambitious LDN targets.

Successful outcomes of LDN National Working Group in Namibia

In **Namibia**, the project team identified and discussed potential opportunities with the Ministry of Land, and suggested regional land use planning options accordingly. Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) supported follow up action to the pilot work by engaging the Ministry of Land in land use planning for the Otjozondjupa region, which is being undertaken by a private company using methods such as the Participatory Rural Appraisal Methodology, which aims to make best use of local knowledge and views in the planning and management of development projects programmes.

High-level coordination approach based on existing institutional arrangements

In **Bhutan**, the existing UNCCD-NAP National Working Group was requested to function as the LDN Working Group, coordinated by the National Soil Service Center and under the guidance of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The working group included a private sector organization as a permanent member.

In **Senegal**, the LDN working group is a sub-group of the steering committee of the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification/Sustainable Land Management, which oversaw the alignment of the NAP with the UNCCD 10-year Strategy, the development of the Country Strategic Investment Framework for sustainable land management and its Integrated Financial Strategy (IFS). The group worked under the leadership of the UNCCD National Focal Point and involved members of civil society, scientists and technicians from both the private sector and government.



LESSON 2: Defining the LDN baseline, trends and drivers of land degradation

Upfront technical assistance and country-tailored advisory services proved relevant for overcoming data analysis challenges, and this contributed to encouraging countries to adopt more ambitious LDN targets





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“The process of data analysis was lengthy and difficult, but ultimately interesting and useful. It generated the surprising result of greater decline in humid regions than in drier regions [...] a result which provides an important correction to a simple narrative that says that the consequences of climate change are most prominent in arid/semi-arid lands.”

Project evaluation: Final Report, 2015^{iv}
Comment by Italy

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LESSON 2: Defining the LDN baseline, trends and drivers of land degradation

Key lesson

All countries were able to establish LDN baselines, based on a small set of indicators and using their national data and/or the global default data provided by the project.

Land cover and land cover change; land productivity; and soil organic carbon (SOC) were the three indicators used by the pilot countries to set the baseline, identify potentially negative trends and formulate corrective measures. Upfront technical assistance and country-tailored advisory services proved relevant for overcoming data analysis challenges and barriers. The close collaboration between the Joint Research Center of the European Union (JRC) as the data provider and the country experts facilitated the interpretation of the data used to set the LDN baselines. Preparatory analysis of the data itself, together with a comprehensive support to equip stakeholders to analyze the data, were key aspects in setting LDN baselines and analyzing land degradation trends and drivers.

Key takeaways

- Some countries used global data as the main source, while others used national data in combination with - or as an alternative to - global data, according to their needs and capacities. In isolated cases, significant differences between global and national data were found, requiring a closer analysis of compatibility between the data sets and data collection systems. In mountainous regions, small island states and highly fragmented landscapes, countries found solutions to the limitations of spatial resolution of global data sets, by introducing medium resolution data from alternative freely available sources.
- By using the same three measurable indicators in all pilot countries, taken from the set of 6 progress indicators agreed by UNCCD, the project succeeded in finding a simple, practical way to consistently and uniformly assess the extent of land degradation and the potential for measures to halt and reverse land degradation.
- The participant countries and the JRC both stated that the process of comparing national data sets with international ones was constructive and useful. The accuracy of LDN baselines can be increased through an iterative exchange between national and global data holders, as countries advance in the LDN target setting process.
- New open source IT tools such as QGIS - a free open source geographic information systemⁱ - provided the necessary computing capacity to handle the data analysis. Additionally, the quantitative data sets provided for each indicator, facilitated the data analysis process and the articulation of LDN with national climate commitments. This data was extracted from global databases and pre-formatted according to the six Land Cover/Use categories recognized by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)ⁱⁱ.
- The LDN target setting pilot exercise allowed countries to assess where they stand in terms not only of land degradation but also of other land-related resource monitoring, such as soil carbon stocks, making the case for the multiple cross-sectoral benefits - in particular climate change - of assessing LDN and engaging in the LDN target setting process.

Country case studies

Assessing the LDN baseline by combining global default data with national data

In **Costa Rica**, global data showed a 0.16% increase in forest cover between 2000 and 2010, while national data suggested a larger increase of 4.7%. Since the country team was confident with the quality of the national data, the preliminary target and the baseline estimations used the national data calculations. These calculations are thus better aligned with previous national assessments and land degradation-related policies. Using national data whenever possible was an effective way to engender country ownership.

Belarus faced the challenge of comparing default data on land cover, which was aggregated into 6 classes based on the land categories of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), with the 14 national categories, and in particular the “forest” category. However, the country team acknowledged that the remote sensing data provided by the project is currently the most cost-effective solution for regular monitoring of land cover change.

Bhutan used national data whenever possible. As a mountainous country, the medium resolution remote sensing data from global sources was not sufficiently accurate. Global and national data were compared and discussed during stakeholder consultations and it was agreed that national data worked better. However, in the absence of national data for soil organic carbon (SOC), global data sets were used.

Increasing capacity to measure and monitor soil organic carbon

In **Algeria**, the LDN baseline setting process enabled the identification of data and information gaps at the national level, particularly for the monitoring of soil organic carbon (SOC) stocks.

Italy applied an IPCC approach developed for greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories in the land sector to predict stocks changes in soil organic carbon based on data on land cover change. In so doing, Italy led the way in demonstrating that it is possible to use an IPCC approachⁱⁱⁱ to measuring SOC content.

Close collaboration between data providers and the country for data processing and analysis

Close contact between the JRC and **Ethiopia** and **Namibia** brought added value in the identification and solving of problems of data assessment and country-specific data interpretation. Ethiopia’s local team utilized the data and advice of the project team (UNCCD and JRC) to deepen the analysis of the productivity trends for different land use types, through statistical and geospatial analysis, particularly for grasslands, croplands and wetlands. This exemplifies how country-tailored engagement and collaboration between data providers and country experts can yield more accurate LDN assessment results.

A specific example of close collaboration with JRC and Namibia was the interpretation of the land productivity trends in grasslands encroached by shrubs. There were lengthy discussions on this issue. The country’s final decision was to consider the detected increase in net primary productivity (NPP) as a negative trend in this particular case. Although shrubs contribute to the restoration of soil carbon stocks and may allow re-opening areas to grazing in the future, they will have to be mechanically removed in order to plant herbaceous species as part of the restoration activities.

An aerial photograph of a dense, vibrant green forest. A winding river flows through the landscape, creating a series of small, tree-covered islands and peninsulas. The water is a deep blue, contrasting with the various shades of green in the forest canopy. The overall scene is a healthy, natural ecosystem.

LESSON 3: Setting LDN targets and associated measures

Understanding the importance and value of setting a target was pivotal to making this happen. Most pilot countries were able to set preliminary targets endorsed by the governments and to communicate and disseminate them openly and transparently at the national and international levels



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“The most innovative outcome of the project is the establishment of specific targets to address land degradation, which, if implemented properly, will allow the country to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality by 2030 [...]. The Ministry of Agriculture, the National Coordinating Body and the Government of Grenada stand ready to support the continuation of this innovative LDN approach through participation in a larger global initiative.”

Mr. Raymond Baptiste, National Project Coordinator
UNCCD National Focal Point
Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Forestry,
Fisheries and Environment
Government of Grenada

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LESSON 3: Setting LDN targets and associated measures

Key lesson

Understanding the importance and value of setting a target was pivotal to making this happen. Most of the pilot countries were able to set preliminary targets endorsed by their governments and to communicate and disseminate them openly and transparently at the national and international levels. Although the established targets are part of a pilot experience and should therefore be considered preliminary rather than definitive, the pilot countries will keep fine-tuning their targets as their capacities increase and their understanding of the process evolves. Different elements and approaches were taken into consideration when deciding on the level of ambition of the targets.

Key takeaways

- During the pilot project most countries also analyzed the financial feasibility of the measures required to meet the proposed targets. Some set several targets with different levels of ambition, according to their respective capacities and potential financing opportunities.
- In the identification of measures to achieve the targets, the selection of “bright spots”, that is, areas that are a focus of positive trends, in addition to the conventional “hot spots”, appears to be beneficial and, if successful, is an innovation from which others can learn. Countries can use “bright spots” as success stories for further learning and dissemination on how to address land degradation, and “hot spots” as areas for priority intervention.

Country case studies

Different approaches to setting LDN targets

Senegal took a top-down approach in defining a target for improving 5% of the land under degradation each year for 15 years, based on an assumption of stable or increasing capacity. Senegal used data from the FAO Land Degradation Assessment for Dryland Areas project⁹, which is considered to be a 'pessimistic' estimation of the levels of degradation. Therefore, its target of a 5% improvement per annum for 15 years is considered ambitious and could possibly address the entire area currently under degradation.

Turkey did not set a national target because it believed the data provided lacked the necessary resolution. It will work from the bottom up through a gradual process of implementing remedial measures in pilot areas and will build a broader picture of land degradation by applying medium resolution data to other areas, focusing on grasslands and croplands.

Bhutan's LDN champions faced challenging questions at the beginning of this process, such as the level at which to set LDN targets, the resources that are potentially available and whether or not decision-makers could be convinced to make LDN a priority. However, not only were they able to find the answers to these questions but they also concluded that the target set in expectation of limited resources was in fact limiting options. The target was therefore revised upwards to a more ambitious level.

An innovative approach for prioritizing LDN action

In **Senegal**, the chosen sites include one 'conventional hot spot', in other words, an area that is a focus of negative trends, but also one 'bright spot', where the actions of the Natural Resources Management Department of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development appear to have improved the quality and productivity of the land. A third site which is both a hot spot and bright spot has also been included and new hot spots in the North-eastern and South-eastern regions may possibly be added during the LDN target setting process.



LESSON 4: Integrating LDN into national development priorities and commitments

The LDN target setting pilot project made the case for the cross-sectoral benefits of LDN as an accelerator of the Sustainable Development Goals and as a lens to ensure policy coherence



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“I wish to underscore the need to implement the LDN target as a means to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals, including those on food security and climate change.”

Barbara Thomson
Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs
Government of South Africa
Speaking on behalf of G-77/China
at UNCCD COP 12

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LESSON 4: Integrating LDN into national development priorities and commitments

Key lesson

The LDN target setting pilot project made the case for the multiple cross-sectoral benefits of LDN as an accelerator of the Sustainable Development Goals. The importance of LDN target setting as a lens to ensure policy coherence among existing initiatives, plans and strategies to combat desertification and loss of biodiversity, and to address climate change and reduce poverty was underscored by the stakeholders. Whenever possible, countries integrated LDN into their UNCCD National Action Programmes and in some cases were able to integrate LDN into other relevant development policies such as their NDCs and relevant land-related legislation.

Key takeaways

- For all countries, the national LDN targets and associated measures include actions that contribute to the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) such as conservation of forest and wetlands for ecosystem services, creating biological corridors, and increasing the number of habitats for rare and endangered species of wild animals and plants, in particular wetlands.
- Many measures identified also aim to achieve a significant reduction of chemical pollution in soils and waters through more sustainable agricultural practices. They therefore contribute to other national commitments on sustainable development matters.
- For most countries, the expected gains in soil carbon were recognized as an important contribution to achieving their NDCs.

Country case studies

Integrating LDN into the National Action Programme

As underlined in the Evaluation Report of the pilot project, the review and refinement of the National Action Programme (NAP) was an integral part of the project and one which, in the opinion of most participating countries, has added value.

When updating its UNCCD NAP for 2014–2024 (NAP3), **Namibia** seized the opportunity to use the NAP as a strong policy vehicle to support LDN by integrating LDN objectives into the targets aimed at reducing land degradation. The LDN targets set during the project were then aligned with the NAP3 Implementation Strategy. Since the NAP has political support at the highest level and benefits from multi-institutional support via the National Sustainable Land Use Management Committee, LDN targets could be set at all levels. This will help to achieve outcome 3 of the NAP: “A functional DLDD Monitoring System are in place by 2018 and supportive processes are in place by 2018 for Namibia to move towards Land Degradation Neutrality.”

For **Costa Rica** and **Ethiopia**, their involvement in the pilot project accelerated and simplified the process of aligning the NAP with the UNCCD 10-Year Strategy. Thanks to the integrated approach used during the LDN target setting process, Costa Rica that had begun NAP alignment in 2013 found new momentum to complete the alignment while it was developing the LDN country report. Ethiopia used the project consultation process provided to solicit input in order to revise its NAP.

LDN target setting, facilitating synergies between the Rio Conventions

The pilot project has facilitated closer cooperation between the UNCCD and the UNFCCC at the country level. Linking LDN to SOC levels enabled **Ethiopia** to make LDN a keystone of its climate change action plans.

In **Belarus**, an indicator for peatlands restoration meets both LDN and climate change targets. One of Belarus's LDN targets (increasing the area of restored peat lands) is also an integral part of Belarus's NDC mitigation targets (increasing carbon stocks).

In **Grenada**, the project has reinforced the intention to move to a single National Coordinating Body for all three Conventions.

In **Armenia**, the LDN target represents a 2.8% increase in its national carbon stocks.

In **Italy**, the composition of the LDN National Working Group was critical to engendering cooperation across the Conventions. Italy cautioned, however, that "fixing desertification is not equivalent to fixing climate change" and that the outcomes of climate change analysis cannot be simplistically applied to the design of LDN interventions.

Synchronizing LDN and national initiatives and programmes

Ethiopia, Senegal and Chad are part of the TerrAfrica initiative. In Ethiopia, the LDN project has helped frame the myriad of existing strategic documents and brought new impetus to tackling desertification, land degradation and drought. The target setting exercise included an analysis of synergies with existing country strategies such as sustainable land management, Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy, REDD+, the Second Growth and Transformational Plan, and the SDGs.

In **Senegal**, target setting and measuring against indicators under the LDN project is supporting the implementation of general strategies such as the UNCCD NAP and the TerrAfrica Country Strategic Investment Framework, by providing practical, operational and measurable actions. The LDN target setting process allowed the Senegalese LDN Working Group to review NAP alignment with the 10-Year Strategy of the UNCCD, taking into account the "Senegal Development Plan" (Plan Sénégal Emergent). The implementation of this concept will enable Senegal to bring together all the stakeholders.



LESSON 5: Leveraging LDN

The target setting exercise, including the identification of measures, provided a clear snapshot of the substantial opportunities that the LDN target setting process brings



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“The National Agricultural and Food Research Fund’s (FNDAS) mission is to mobilize public and private funds dedicated to funding of agricultural services on a competitive and contractual basis, in order to increase income and ensure food security.”

Jean-Charles Faye,
Executive Director
Agro-Silvo-Pastoral National Development Fund
Government of Senegal

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LESSON 5: Leveraging LDN

Key lesson

The target setting exercise and the identification of measures provided a clear snapshot of the substantive opportunities the LDN target setting process brings, even though LDN implementation was beyond the scope of the pilot project. Some pilot countries identified legal instruments that will enable LDN targets to be achieved. Some went further and, as an outcome of the pilot project, have established legal mandates for the implementation of LDN. Other countries focused on tapping into the growing financing opportunities that consolidation of this process will bring and pre-identified potential financial sources for each of the established measures, including detailed budgets and lists of potential partners.

Key takeaways

- Setting a target based on a judicious assessment of the financial feasibility and screening of the potential sources of finance, proved critical for delivering on ambitious but realistic targets. Most countries went beyond identifying the measures to achieve the target. They developed detailed budgets and cost estimates for the required measures as well as projections of the measures to be covered by the national budget and those to be financed from other sources. Countries also used this exercise to decide on the level of ambition of the targets based on the financing opportunities they envisioned as a result of the LDN target setting leverage efforts.
- As a result of the identification of land degradation processes and 'hot spots', most pilot countries now have a set of potential and priority sites/ areas/ideas on which to build LDN transformative projects in order to upscale sustainable land management and restoration activities.

Country case studies

From pilot to transformative policies

In **Indonesia**, the efforts of the LDN working group to showcase the benefits of achieving LDN and the economic impacts of inaction contributed significantly to the Government's decision to ban further land concessions for oil palm cultivation.

In **Ethiopia**, there is a groundswell of opinion in support of LDN. The Government has recently committed to reforest 22 000 km² by 2020, and has made LDN a priority.

In **Belarus**, LDN is a government priority; the NAP is an integral part of the National Strategy of Sustainable Social and Economic Development and must be referenced by public agencies when designing national, sectoral and regional programmes.

In **Turkey**, the Ministry of Forestry is committed to scaling up analysis and rolling-out corrective measures.

The Republic of **Armenia** has an approved NAP and the Government is fully committed to implementing it. Resources from the national budget and the private sector (based on the polluter pays principle) are to be allocated to some NAP implementation activities.

Transformative investments for LDN, using dedicated funds and mobilizing the private sector

In **Senegal**, the SWOT analysis of the NAP highlighted to support up scaling LDN through sustainable land management, two funds are critical. The National Agricultural and Food Research Fund (FNRAA-Fonds national de recherches agricoles et agro-alimentaires) is an innovative public financing mechanism that funds agricultural research. The Agro-Silvo-Pastoral National Development Fund (FNDASP-Fonds National de Développement Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral) aims to mobilize public and private funds to finance agro-silvo-pastoral development. These funds could be used to finance LDN transformative projects on the ground.

Tapping into financing opportunities for LDN and sustainable development

Bhutan conducted a very thorough exercise to ensure that synergies and coherence with existing national initiatives were tapped into as part of the LDN target setting process. For example, the five LDN “hot-spots” identified were part of a sustainable land management project under GEF and BTFEC (Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation) that existed at the time of the Pilot Project. The sources of funding were already identified in the 2014 NAP, which also incorporates the 5-year Plan for 2013-2018. The Country LDN team researched further into these financing mechanisms and presented them to the National Working Group. Payments for Environmental Services (PES) were identified as promising schemes. Three such schemes are already being implemented in Bhutan for drinking water supply. Another area with PES potential is the compensation of farmers for crop damage caused by wildlife. This could be a national level fund supported by external sources such as International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Enabling the environment for achieving the LDN target

In April 2015, the Government of **Belarus** approved the Strategy for the Implementation of the UNCCD and the 2016-2020 NAP for the Prevention of Land (and Soil) Degradation. According to the Strategy and NAP, one of the top priorities in preventing of land degradation is the achievement of LDN, for which Belarus has established a national voluntary target. The decision makes the inclusion of LDN mandatory for all state and field plans at the 5-year planning level, including for commercial enterprises (the Government is the major enterprise owner in Belarus). LDN indicators are included in the decision. This demonstrates that the project approach has been fully endorsed by the Government. The success factor was the timing of the project (while the Strategy for the Implementation of the UNCCD was being prepared) and the opportunity this offered.

At the time of the writing of its country report, **Costa Rica** was in the process of issuing a Joint Ministerial Directive and regulation for LDN implementation in the field, by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment, Energy, Ocean and Land Management. The Directive gives the Ministries the mandate to articulate and integrate programmes and budgets for LDN implementation. This constitutes a strategy for Costa Rica to implement the National Action Programme (NAP) in order to comply with the preliminary targets for LDN as proposed in the country report.

From lessons to actions: key recommendations for countries wanting to set LDN targets

N°1: Define country specific LDN targets to be endorsed at the highest political level

What to do...

- The specific realities of each country require close attention when defining LDN targets. The set of indicators used for the pilot project may be complemented by other relevant national (or sub-national) indicators that suit country-specific realities better.
- Once LDN targets have been defined, they should be endorsed at the highest political level and supported by a relevant institutional framework. These targets should be implemented through a cross-sectoral approach, involving all stakeholders from the scientific community, civil society and the private sector.

N°2: Improve monitoring capacities and LDN indicators

What to do...

- Land cover/use, land productivity dynamics and soil organic carbon databases and data processing methodologies must be further enhanced both at national and global levels (measurement accuracy, resolution, periodicity) to ensure effective monitoring of progress made towards the achievement of LDN targets.
- Although sustainable land management can be easily monitored using the land cover/land use change/land productivity indicators, further development of the soil organic carbon indicator is essential in connection with climate change policies.
- The globally accessible SOC-related databases are based on *in situ* samples and models. Proper soil organic carbon monitoring systems, focusing on the living fraction of soil organic carbon, need to be developed further and deployed using internationally accepted standards. This is possible and affordable using near infrared technology.



N°3: Support the LDN process through awareness raising, communication and advocacy

What to do...

- To boost interest and share knowledge, the LDN process must be accompanied by a strong awareness, communication and advocacy campaign, from the local to international levels in order to raise the social and economic demand for LDN.
- Engagement of all stakeholders is essential to facilitate the 'buy in' to the policies associated with the LDN targets set by government. Such political support makes the upscaling of sustainable land management and restoration activities possible. For this to become a reality, LDN training and capacity building must be strategized.

N°4: Develop transformative projects in identified "hot spots" to achieve LDN

What to do...

- Turning lessons into actions requires the development of transformative bankable projects through sustainable land management and restoration activities based on the "hot spots" and/or "bright spots" identified during the LDN target setting process.
- Achieving LDN requires breaking with the current short-term view of land as a stand-alone resource and embracing a landscape-based approach.
- The successful implementation of transformative projects relies on the full involvement of all stakeholders, including the private sector, which can bring innovative and substantial financial support.

N°5: Set up a LDN Monitoring and Evaluation System

What to do...

- To monitor and evaluate LDN achievements, a centralized land management/land degradation monitoring and evaluation information system must be established. This Monitoring and Evaluation System should be institutionalized within an appropriate permanent body to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration.
- Whenever possible, such a system should be based on existing systems and build on previous efforts and capacities such as those developed for REDD+ implementation. The information generated by these systems must be accessible to all ministries that have an impact on land use. Each ministry could feed the system and could, in turn, have access to the centrally-stored data. All information should also be accessible to sub-national governments, including the regions and local communities.
- The private sector and civil society organizations should have access to relevant public information on a demand basis in order to provide input on land-related issues and provide feedback on degradation and restoration initiatives, conflicts and opportunities for investment.
- The Monitoring and Evaluation System should provide updated information on key land-related indicators, including land cover/use changes, land productivity trends and variation in SOC.

Frequently asked questions

WHAT IS LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY?

The UNCCD defines LDN as “a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remain[s] stable or increase[s] within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems”.

The LDN concept was developed to encourage implementation of an optimal mix of measures designed to avoid, reduce or reverse land degradation in order to achieve a state of no-net loss of healthy and productive land. LDN aims to balance anticipated losses in land-based natural capital and associated ecosystem functions and services with measures that produce alternative gains through such approaches as land restoration and sustainable land management.

LDN is a simple idea and a powerful tool. It means securing enough healthy and productive resources by avoiding degradation whenever possible, managing the land better, and restoring the land that has already been degraded. At its core are better land management practices and better land use planning. It can improve economic, social and ecological sustainability for future generations

Numerous direct links exist between LDN and SDGs, such as eliminating poverty, ensuring food security, promoting gender equality, protecting the environment and using natural resources sustainably. LDN serves as a catalyst in achieving these goals.

WHY SET A LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY TARGET?

In October 2015, the twelfth session of the Conference of Parties of the (COP 12) concluded that “striving to achieve SDG target 15.3 is a strong vehicle for driving implementation of the UNCCD” (decision 3/ COP.12). Moreover, COP.12 recognized that “Parties may use the UNCCD to guide their policies relating to Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD) and voluntary targets when striving to achieve LDN at national and subnational levels”. By offering a time-bound, ambitious objective, the LDN target represents the next stage in narrowing down the objectives of the UNCCD and increasing conceptual tangibility. That is, “to demonstrate in practice that implementing this approach is not only achievable in the short and medium term, but will produce considerable societal and economic benefits in the short, medium and long terms.”

WHAT WAS THE LDN TARGET SETTING PILOT PROJECT ALL ABOUT?

The Pilot Project aimed to translate the LDN concept into practice by facilitating the setting of national voluntary targets, making use of the implementation framework and the monitoring and assessment mechanisms established within the UNCCD process. The next step is to move from scale to action, drawing on the experiences and lessons learned from the pilot phase to translate the LDN approach into transformative projects and programmes and to secure financing for their implementation in order to achieve LDN by 2030.

WHAT ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS IN THE TARGET SETTING PROCESS?

1. Leveraging LDN: LDN target setting creates opportunities for leverage and coordination among key stakeholders involved in land management. Top-level political commitment is one of the key factors for successful LDN target setting and implementation.
2. Assessing LDN: The assessment of the current status of land degradation and associated drivers is needed to understand future changes and track progress towards LDN. It provides the evidence base for setting sound LDN targets and making decisions on potential interventions.
3. Setting LDN targets and measures: Defining LDN targets means setting the level of ambition that a country wants to achieve in combatting land degradation. Measures to achieve LDN cover the whole range of possible interventions; to avoid, reduce or reverse land degradation.
4. Achieving LDN: LDN can only be achieved if a favorable environment has been created for the implementation of the associated measures.

HOW CAN THESE LESSONS SUPPORT OTHER INTERESTED COUNTRIES?

The steps and activities that were undertaken in the framework of the pilot project were used in formulating the UNCCD LDN Target Setting Programme, which assists interested countries to set their national targets. The lessons reflected here are linked to the building blocks of the target setting process and, therefore, apply to any Party wishing to engage in this process.



Main features of the pilot project

Key elements of the pilot project

ELEMENTS

- Timeline: 2014-15
- Led by the UNCCD secretariat
- Developed with 14 pioneer countries from all regions
- Developed with the financial support of The Republic of Korea, through the Changwon Initiative

COMPONENTS

1. Establishment of a robust, collaborative project implementation structure that includes international/national LDN support teams and LDN multi-stakeholder national working groups, comprising: governmental institutions; scientific bodies; the private sector; NGOs; local communities; and land users (land managers, farmers' organizations, etc.).
2. Review of progress in the formulation and alignment of NAPs to identify how Land Degradation Neutrality has been or can be incorporated into the NAP formulation/alignment process, so that LDN becomes a key objective of the process.
3. Support/guide partner countries in the planning and implementation of LDN by setting appropriate national targets based on scientifically sound data.
4. Engage in outreach and communication at all levels. Distill lessons learned in order to provide evidence-based practical input to other countries interested in setting LDN targets and feed international consultations to achieve LDN by 2030.

MAIN OUTCOMES

- National LDN consultation frameworks established and fully operational
- Preliminary LDN national voluntary targets set
- LDN targets integrated into the NAPs and selected national policies and commitments

Which countries were involved in the pilot project?

INDONESIA

CHILE

ITALY

BELARUS

COSTA RICA

NAMIBIA

ALGERIA

BHUTAN

ETHIOPIA

SENEGAL

ARMENIA

CHAD

GRENADA

TURKEY

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