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Land Degradation Neutrality: Global Vision and Perspectives for Africa

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Abstract

Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) is the new paradigm for avoiding, reducing and reversing land degradation in an integrated way as a means of attaining the Rio+20 aspiration for a land degradation-neutral world. Defined as “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”, the goal of LDN is maintaining or enhancing the land resource base - in other words, the stocks of natural capital associated with land resources and the ecosystem services that flow from them. LDN is also fundamental for pursuing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 Life on Land”. The recently published Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality (Orr et al. 2017; Cowie et al. 2018) provides a scientific foundation for understanding, implementing and monitoring LDN.

The framework is structured around five ‘modules’: Vision of LDN, which captures the goal that LDN is intended to achieve; Frame of Reference, that explains the LDN baseline against which achievement is measured; Mechanism for Neutrality, that describes the counterbalancing mechanism; Achieving Neutrality, that presents the theory of change (logic model) articulating the pathway for implementing LDN, including preparatory analysis and enabling policies; and Monitoring Neutrality, which presents the LDN indicators. Principles are provided to govern application of the framework and to help prevent unintended outcomes during implementation and monitoring of LDN. These principles are designed to encourage the creation of an enabling environment which incentivizes the pursuit of LDN while encouraging responsible governance to help ensure better access, control and stewardship over land, including strengthening tenure security, access and user rights for women and men, in particular the poor and vulnerable. It also incorporates the need for gender-responsive policies and measures designed to ensure the full and effective participation of both men and women in planning, decision-making and implementation at all levels. Coordinating the theoretical development of the framework with regular input from on-the-ground teams who were conducting training events to launch the LDN Target Setting Program (TSP) led real-time testing of scientific concepts under very practical conditions. This has ensured that the conceptual framework is firmly grounded in science with clear entry points for developing the guidance necessary to achieve or exceed LDN into the future.

The conceptual framework has been designed to create a bridge between the vision and the practical implementation of LDN, by defining LDN in operational terms. This practical approach has led to significant country buy-in: to date, 118 countries — including 51 in Africa — have embarked on the process of establishing national targets on LDN.

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