

Land Degradation Neutrality

A new impetus to address the global challenge of land and soil degradation

Background

Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) is part of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 15.3)** and, at the same time, the central objective of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In order to translate this global vision into national plans, the 195 member countries of the UNCCD are asked to set voluntary LDN targets. The Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD has established a **LDN target setting program (TSP)** that supports countries in defining LDN targets and implementation pathways. So far, more than 100 countries have expressed their interest to take part in the TSP. On behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) GIZ supports selected countries in their efforts to implement LDN through pilot projects.

LDN is 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” (UNCCD Decision 3/COP 12)

Objective of LDN pilot projects

The objective of LDN pilot projects is **to improve the conditions for a systematic promotion and implementation of sustainable land management.**

LDN pilot projects usually focus on **strengthening ongoing LDN efforts** in a selected **subnational region**. Partner institutions are supported to provide illustrative examples for the following key questions:

- How can LDN target setting processes be shaped?
- Which implementation strategies exist for translating LDN into practice?
- How can LDN be integrated and linked with other policies and targets (forest and landscape restoration (FLR), climate, biodiversity)?
- How does LDN monitoring work and how can corresponding capacities be built?

As such, LDN pilots comprise **technical** (indicators, monitoring) as well as **planning components** (target setting, implementation strategies). Experiences from subnational pilot projects will inform national LDN processes.

Land and soils are an essential global good. Their increasing degradation threatens food security and the resilience of rural communities while contributing to climate change and biodiversity loss. To reduce and reverse this trend through sustainable land management and the restoration of degraded areas is key to achieve sustainable development. The concept of LDN provides a new impetus to address this global challenge.

Working principles

- Driven by national ownership and demand (active participation of the country in the LDN TSP)
- Close cooperation with existing projects of German development cooperation in the country
- Implementation orientation: improving the conditions for implementation of SLM (but no carrying out of physical measures as such)
- Integrated: linking LDN to existing policies, plans and programmes
- Complementarity to the activities of the UNCCD/GM at national level
- Context specific: adaptation of the LDN approach to local context and priorities
- Cross-sectoral: facilitating cooperation between sectors and ministries
- Upscaling perspective: sub-national LDN pilots aim at supporting the national LDN process

NATIONAL LDN PROCESS

SUBNATIONAL PILOT PROJECT

Outcome: Conditions for systematic and cross-sectoral implementation of sustainable land management have improved



Components and activities

(a) Technical Component: developing LDN baseline and trend analysis

In order to define and monitor LDN targets a **baseline** is needed. The UNCCD suggests 3 LDN indicators that will be used for reporting under the Convention and the SDG: (1) land cover and land cover change, (2) land productivity and (3) soil organic carbon. These indicators can be adapted and complemented according to specific contexts.

Analyzing trends over time in these indicators allows for identifying degradation processes and their geographical hotspots. As such, baseline and trend analysis inform planning processes and build the basis for monitoring progress towards LDN.

Possible activities

- Facilitate contextualization of LDN indicators and selection of additional indicators (technical advise)
- Support development and interpretation of baseline and trend analysis (data acquisition and analysis)
- Build capacities for processing and analyzing data for LDN indicators (trainings)

(b) Planning Component: supporting the identification of LDN targets and implementation strategies

Voluntary LDN targets and corresponding implementation strategies are to be identified through (sub-)national multi-stakeholder processes. To facilitate such processes through the provision of information on strategic options and studies is at the core of the planning component.

LDN targets themselves can take many forms, ranging from comprehensive “no net loss” targets to specific action-oriented ones. An opportunity lies in leveraging LDN by identifying synergies with other existing policies and targets.

As important as target setting is the identification of concrete **strategies for implementation**. In general terms, LDN can be approached by (1) avoiding, (2) reducing land degradation and (3) rehabilitating degraded land. This may be achieved through promoting and implementing suitable SLM/FLR activities.

Another, more systematic implementation strategy is to mainstream LDN in general land use/spatial planning processes. This way, LDN may serve as a “guiding principle” or vision for land use/spatial planning and in some cases may even allow for establishing compensation schemes.

Furthermore, LDN planning processes may be supported through studies on the economic aspects of land degradation and SLM options following the **Economics of Land Degradation (ELD)** approach.

Possible activities

- Support established LDN multi-stakeholder processes (process management)
- Advise on strategies to promote and implement SLM/FLR approaches (best practices)
- Identify possibilities to integrate LDN in land use planning processes (concept studies)
- Identify synergies with other policies and targets (strategic studies)
- Assess costs and benefits of different implementation strategies (ELD studies and scenarios)

(c) Upscaling Component: providing lessons learnt to national LDN process

An integral part of all LDN pilot projects is to add value to the national LDN process by providing examples and lessons learnt. Given the novelty of LDN and the increasing number of countries participating in the TSP there is also demand for innovative case studies at the international level.

Possible activities

- Facilitate exchange between pilot projects and national LDN working groups (workshops)
- Advise on opportunities for upscaling implementation strategies (feasibility studies)
- Analyze experiences and inform international LDN process (lessons learnt)

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