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Contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development  
Submission from the UNCCD

**1. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level:**

About one billion people in developing countries live in extreme poverty; two-thirds of them live in rural areas. 795 million people are estimated to be chronically undernourished as of 2014, often as a direct consequence of land degradation, declining soil fertility, unsustainable water use, drought and loss of biodiversity. Three out of four poor people in developing countries live in rural areas and agriculture is a source of livelihoods for an estimated 86% of rural people. It provides jobs for 1.3 billion smallholders and landless workers(ii). Water scarcity is on the rise too. Over 1.7 billion people are currently living in river basins where water use exceeds recharge.iii By 2050, at least one in four people is likely to live in a country affected by chronic or recurring shortages of fresh water (iv)

To ensure that no one is left behind we must look to healthy and productive land. Human life depends on the land. Plant life provides 80% of our dietv and millions rely directly on agriculture for their survival and livelihoods. Forests - trees on the land - account for 30% of the Earth's surface (vi), providing vital habitats for millions of people (vii) and species and they are important sources of clean air and water.

The protection of our land resources must be a high priority if we are to make a transition to a more sustainable society. This is strongly reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 which states: “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” (viii) At its heart is the concept of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN Target 15.3)ix, which is about achieving a balance between three processes: degradation, rehabilitation/restoration and sustainable land management. Given that over 40% of the world's poor depend on degraded lands for essential services, such as food, fuel, raw material, and water purification, restoring productive capacity of the land could lead to significant strides in decreasing economic vulnerability and promoting long-term development.

In order to “leave no one behind” achieving LDN needs to be prioritized. Addressing the major challenges of sustainable land and water resources management and applying the principles of LDN at scale is a precondition for the achievement of almost all 17 SDG's. As of today, 104 Parties to the UNCCD have started the target setting process related to LDN. It is expected that by COP 13 in September/October 2017 at least 50 will have concluded the target setting process and will have started to initiate transformative projects focused on implementation on the ground.

**2. The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:**

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) supports interested countries in the national Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) target setting process, including the definition of national baselines, measures and targets to achieve LDN by 2030.



The LDN target setting exercise related to target 15.3 provides Parties with tool kits and a reporting platform for planning, implementing, and reporting on sustainable land management practices, using a scientifically robust methodology. Capacity building on how to use the methodology is needed so that monitoring systems at national level can be established and maintained, assisting Parties in regularly monitoring their activities to reverse negative trends relating to the loss of fertile land.

Parties to the UNCCD highlighted in the last review process [2016/2017] that particularly the establishment of functional monitoring systems at national level is still considered one of the limiting factors that prevents a continuous monitoring of land degradation processes and hence an effective implementation of large scale investments into land.

The mismanagement and over-exploitation of land and water resources, causing land degradation and desertification, has been identified as risk contributing to famine and drought, forced migration, poverty and conflict and the achievement of other SDGs.

African countries are at a critical juncture. Confronted with internal challenges of persistent poverty, unemployment and population growth, the resource base of many productive sectors is facing environmental degradation, including desertification, soil erosion, and water scarcity, depletion of fish stocks and effects of climate change.

While over the past 15 years, most countries in Africa experienced sustained economic growth, 70 percent of the region's population is under the age of 30, and slightly more than 20 percent are young people between the ages of 15 to 24 and unemployment rates are already high. In North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa it stood at 11.8 per cent 7.5 per cent in 2016, respectively.<sup>x</sup> The employment challenge is even more pronounced for youth. In 2016, the unemployment rate for youth was 29.3 and 10.9 per cent in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, respectively<sup>xi</sup> compared to a world average youth unemployment of 13.1 per cent.<sup>xii</sup> The lack of decent work opportunities is a significant determinant of migration.<sup>xiii</sup>

African countries are highly dependent on natural resources. Natural capital assets are critical to the economic activities and the livelihood of millions of people who depend on fertile soil, forest, fishery and other resources from nature. A closer look at employment in Africa indicates that the natural resource-based sector continues to be the largest job providers. Together, these sectors account for 80 per cent of employment.

In parallel, land degradation and climate change pose considerable risks to Africa's socio-economic development. As precipitation patterns shift, yields from rain fed agriculture are predicted to fall compounded stress on water resources is foreseen to be intensified with escalated risks of flooding drought and desertification. Meanwhile 65 % of Africa's cropland is already affected by land degradation and recent estimates show that 4 to 12 percent of Africa's GDP is lost due to environmental degradation.<sup>xiv</sup> Thus environmental degradation could lead to serious disruption of economic and social activity in many natural resource sectors, exacerbating joblessness, poverty and migration and social tensions.

### **3. Valuable lessons learned on eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity:**

Sustainable development requires smarter integrated approaches than those we have used up until now. It requires these to be applied at a much greater scale. As a globally agreed target, LDN can be used to galvanize action to address land degradation in all terrestrial ecosystems across entire landscapes. Two billion hectares of degraded land are available to kick-start a real green economy creating enormous multiplier effects for employment, learning and poverty reduction



Achieving LDN requires a paradigm shift in land stewardship: from 'degrade-abandon-migrate' to 'protect-sustain-restore'.<sup>xv</sup>

This means cooperation among various sectors and national sustainable development plans:

- adopting sustainable land management (SLM) policies and practices in order to minimize current, and avoid future, land degradation; and
- Rehabilitating degraded and abandoned lands as well as restoring degraded natural and semi-natural ecosystems that provide vital benefits to people and working landscapes.

As stated above, LDN can be used to galvanize action to address land degradation in all terrestrial ecosystems across entire landscapes, thereby reducing unemployment rates especially for younger people.

An interesting example how LDN can put into practice is the newly launched Triple S (3S) Initiative on Security, Stability and Sustainably in Africa. Under the leadership of Senegal and Morocco the initiative seeks to ensure policy coherence by shaping an integrated approach to simultaneously address the range of major challenges that are set to cause profound changes in the African continent in the decades to come. Its focus is on the restoration of 10 million hectares degraded land and granting secure tenure by 2020 with the aim to create 2 million green jobs for young people, women and return migrants. A land-based job approach as envisaged by the 3S initiative constitutes an effective response to provide unemployed youth with an income and a sense of purpose and help returning migrants re-integrating.

In this context a number of analytical studies and quantitative assessments have shown that a global transformation to a greener economy could generate 15 to 60 million additional jobs globally<sup>xvi</sup> over the next two decades, and lift tens of millions of workers out of poverty, with important improvements in productivity and income levels for rural communities. According to a study by Herren et al the shift to a green agricultural sector could create over 200 million full time jobs in 2050 globally, across the entire food production system.<sup>xvii</sup> Finally a very recent study suggests that the total employment effect of the so called restoration economy<sup>xviii</sup> ranges from 10.4 to 39.7 jobs per USD 1 million invested.<sup>xix</sup> To set this into perspective, the oil and gas industry supports approximately 5.3 jobs per USD 1 million invested.<sup>xx</sup>

In sum the ideas of LDN seen in combination with green growth and the subsequent creation of green employment could be an effective strategy to tackle some key African challenges and making goals 1 (poverty reduction) 2 (no hunger) 6 (water) 7 (clean energy), 8 (decent work and economic growth) 12 (responsible production) 13 (climate action) 15 (life on land) of the SDGs mutually supportive rather than conflicting.

#### **4. Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of poverty eradication and achieving prosperity:**

Despite these efforts, at various policy makers and stakeholders' levels as well as spatial scales, the global trend remains toward increasing land degradation that contradicts the principle of *no one is left behind*.

This is mostly attributed to 1) Insufficient investment, 2) weak policy and enforcement 3) and ineffective partnership building

- Efforts to restore and manage our land resources more sustainably will require dedicated financing, enabling policies and incentives, and multi-sectoral land use planning. The current level of investment both from National Governments and international community, including the private



sector and donors have been limited in scale and scope compared to the severity and extent of land degradation.<sup>xxi</sup>

- Essential national policies and regulations as well as international commitments exist but their implementation and enforcement in the field remains very weak.<sup>xxii</sup> Incentive policies for secure access to land resources through appropriate land tenure systems providing the right to land particularly to vulnerable people are lacking or insufficient.
- The multi-dimensional scale and aspects of land management call for more coordination and cooperation in planning and decision making among different government agencies, especially those responsible for agriculture, livestock, forestry, land and water resources, environment, science and technology, finance, planning, legislation and tourism. Therefore coordination and harmonization of SLM objectives and initiatives through better mainstreaming within national budgets, poverty reduction and rural development strategies and development plans is essential.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- Effective SLM requires multi-stakeholder partnerships to bring together indigenous and scientific knowledge, and to reconcile different stakeholder interests and needs, within both the public and private sectors, including community based and non-government civil society organizations.

#### **5. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required:**

With the exception of an immediate and life threatening situation, the decision to migrate is often made in the context of a variety of “push” and “pull” factors. Rarely is the decision to migrate made due to a single reason. Among the root causes of migration are: 1) Economic factors, 2) Social factors, 3) Degraded security conditions, and 4) Environmental factors. There is no consensus yet on defining the issue of environmentally induced migration. What is commonly agreed on is that ecosystem changes, be they physical, chemical and/or biological changes in nature, can impair or render the ecosystem unsuitable to support human life, forcing inhabitants to leave the land. To this date, however, no international agreement has been reached to provide a status for environmental migrants.

What is certain is that millions are affected. Hundreds of millions face consequences of desertification. Various studies have been made that global environmental change could drive anywhere from 50 to almost 700 million people to migrate by 2050. These studies underscore the complexity of the multi-causal relationship between coupled socio-ecological systems and human mobility, yet they have fueled the debate about “environmentally induced migration”. The environmental signal in migration patterns may grow as the impacts of climatic and societal change become more apparent, and this is especially true for people living in drylands. Desertification is land degradation in drylands, resulting from various factors including climatic variations and human activities. Some 41% of the Earth’s land surface is classified as drylands. They are home to an estimated two billion people who experience relatively low human well-being and development indicators, such as high infant mortality and low GNP per capita.

Awareness raising through the High-level political forum is needed in order to create the nexus between environmental degradation and migration, environmental degradation and security in the minds of the international community.

#### **6. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in poverty eradication:**

While the SDG agenda is global, practical solutions will be needed at the local and landscape-scale. It is at this scale that natural resources and ecosystem services are best managed and that people live their daily lives. Sustainable land management, rehabilitation and restoration can provide immediate, cost-effective benefits across the board. With forward-looking policies, adequate tailored



finance and incentives, and strong political will and ambition, the potential of the land use sector can be unleashed. We already have proven technologies and good practices that contribute to a more stable and resilient world. Now it is just a matter of scaling them up and scaling them out to accelerate implementation of the SDGs.

- Formulate and/or mainstream and implement proper policy interventions in line with the principle of Land Degradation Neutrality. Enforcement of the existing rules and regulations in the areas of land use planning and land tenure. Support the scaling up of best technologies and human /institutional capacities for effective SLM.
- Increase investments in SLM by devoting significant national budget resources in in line with commitments for the achievements of SDG's 1, 2 and 15 notably. Mobilize international funding to boost investments in SLM for more income diversification and increasing and livelihood support.
- Strengthen partnership and synergy by building a common action-based SLM framework with governments, donors, NGOs and UN agencies. Many land-based practices can help communities and countries adapt to the impacts of climate change and halt biodiversity loss. Creating and strengthen synergy among the three Rio-Conventions would lower the transaction cost while simultaneously supports results-based land management practices on the ground. For instance by using common indicators or monitoring and evaluation frameworks, the Rio Conventions and their finance mechanism, such as the Global Environmental Facility, would be in a position to better assess and compare the effectiveness of land management policies and practices in meeting their common goals. This would greatly contribute to the enabling environment by:
  - creating opportunities for collaboration among diverse sectors and stakeholders;
  - enriching reporting processes and serving the long-term goals of the Rio Conventions; and
  - supporting a more harmonized approach to sustainable development<sup>xxiv</sup>

i UNDP (n.d.): End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda/goal-2.html>

ii Action Aid (2012): Fed up: Now's time to invest in Agroecology, p. 13.

iii UN (2015): Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all, <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/>

iv UNDP (2015): Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda/goal-6.html>

v UNEP(n.d.)Goal 15Life on land, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda/goal-15.html>

vi UNEP(n.d.)Goal 15Life on land, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda/goal-15.html>, FAO (2010): Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010, Key findings, p. 3 <http://foris.fao.org/static/data/tra2010/KeyFindings-en.pdf>

vii Forests are home to 350 million people around the world, while 60 million indigenous peoples almost wholly depend on them for their livelihoods. Eliasch Review (2008): Climate Change: Financing Global Forests, p.9.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/228833/9780108507632.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228833/9780108507632.pdf)

viii GA (2015): Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Goal 15, A/RES/70/1

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)

ix The concept of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) has been adopted as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is enshrined in Target 15.3: "by 2030, combat desertification, and restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world"

x ILO (2016): World employment and social outlook, trends 2016, p. 13.

xi ILO (2016): World employment and social outlook, trends for youth 2016, p. 5.

xii ILO (2016): World employment and social outlook, trends for youth 2016, p. 5.

xiii ILO (2016): World Employment and Social Outlook 2016: Trends for youth, p. 12.

xiv ADB (2012): African Development Report 2012 – Towards Green Growth in Africa, p. 14.

xvi ILO (2013): Sustainable development, decent work and green jobs, p. 32.

xvii Herren et al (2012): Green Jobs for a Revitalized Food and Agriculture Sector, p. 31.

xviii BenDor, Todd et al. define restoration as any combination of activities intended to result in ecological uplift, improve ecosystem health, and result in a functioning ecosystem that provides a suite of ecosystem services (i.e. the beneficial functions of ecological systems. By defining the restoration economy around the industries that contribute to these efforts, the authors inductively define restoration as being comprised of the set of economic activities that contribute to restoration, from project planning, engineering and legal services, to intermediate suppliers of inputs, to on-the-ground earthmoving, forestry, and landscaping firms that contribute to the ecological restoration process. BenDor, Todd et al.( 2015): Estimating the Size and Impact of the Ecological Restoration Economy. PLoS ONE 10(6), p. 2,

<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0128339>



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- xix BenDor, Todd et al. (2015): Estimating the Size and Impact of the Ecological Restoration Economy. PLoS ONE 10(6), p. 3, <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0128339>. This value spans a range between 6.8 and 39.7 based on location, geographic scale, and restoration type with an economic output multiplier of between 1.6–2.6 (multiplier for total economic output from investments) and an employment multiplier of between 1.5 and 3.8 (the number of jobs created for every restoration job).
- xx BenDor, Todd et al. (2015): Estimating the Size and Impact of the Ecological Restoration Economy. PLoS ONE 10(6), p. 3, <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0128339>
- xxi FAO (2008): Challenges for sustainable land management (SLM) for food security in Africa, ARC/08/INF/5, p. 9.
- xxii FAO (2008): Challenges for sustainable land management (SLM) for food security in Africa, ARC/08/INF/5, p. 8.
- xxiii FAO (2008): Challenges for sustainable land management (SLM) for food security in Africa, ARC/08/INF/5, p. 9.
- xxiv UNCCD (2015): Land degradation neutrality. Resilience at local, national and regional levels, p. 21.