

Financing LDN : what makes sense ?

POSITION PAPER FROM UNCCD CSOs

Land is a vital component of the environment and is crucial in global and local development issues. Land forms the basis of the ecosystems by hosting habitats of biodiversity, providing ecosystems services and producing food. Moreover, land is dignity and identity of indigenous peoples and local communities and is rooted in the livelihoods of those communities that compose 47 % of the world population.

Combating land degradation is not an option but an injunction for the future, to face climate change, desertification, biodiversity loss and food security issues. Combating land degradation in the drylands, so-called combating desertification, is essential to address the concerns of one third of the world population, living on 44 % of the world's land surface. Combating land degradation in drylands is thus a priority, yet has not been effectively addressed by national governments and has not received funding at the scale that is required.

Amongst the 'three sisters', the Rio multilateral environment agreements, the UNCCD is explicitly dedicated to combating desertification, land degradation and poverty in drylands, as stated in its Article 1. Combating land degradation is considered as a public good.

Reversing land degradation by striving for a land degradation neutral world (article 206 Rio +20, The Future We Want) can only be achieved by massive action involving all stakeholders. The objective of achieving Land Degradation Neutrality is an opportunity to energise and organise those actions. And necessarily the three dimensions of avoiding land degradation, reducing land degradation and rehabilitating degraded land should all be taken into account! But the question remains: how to finance and implement Land Degradation Neutrality in a way that preserves the environment, enhances food security and reduces poverty?

About financing and implementing LDN, the civil society strongly insists upon:

- The integrity and cohesion of local and indigenous populations, which must not be undermined, and their land rights must not be weakened;
- The financing of LDN, which should not become a vehicle to transform the land of family farmers and traditional land users into a good in financial or speculative markets
- The responsibility of states and public stakeholders in financing and implementing LDN, which must not be taken over by private sector;
- A sound balance between global environmental concerns and social concerns related to local land using communities.

In the context of financing and implementing LDN, civil society recommends the UNCCD:

To ensure that LDN is financed in a coherent, sustainable and ethical way:

- Public investments in land are essential because land is vital for human well-being and sustainable livelihoods, and requires responsible actions from states;
- All Parties are encouraged, in a transparent manner, to create national working groups to allocate public funds to LDN, composed of government officers, scientists, technical advisors, community-based organisations and civil society;
- Several options are provided for financing LDN: close collaboration with the scientists of the SPI, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the UNCCD CSO network is necessary because these people possess profound technical and project experience and local level knowledge. An independent impact study of the financing options must assure a selection of the most viable options that provide the least risk to indigenous peoples and local communities;
- Coherence is created with the Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions regarding financing LDN, as it is included in cross-cutting SDGs. Resources for financing LDN should also come from these Conventions;
- Criteria are established for private investors in land-based resources, to assure that social and environmental concerns are adequately addressed. The establishment of these criteria, as well as the different steps in the process of financing LDN (such as the cash flows and project selection) need to be transparent;
- Robust and long-term responsibility are ensured on the part of the UNCCD in any and all systems established for the financing of LDN;
- A steering committee with decision making power is established in which UNCCD accredited NGOs and scientists are represented in all financial mechanisms;
- A minimum percentage of the total budget is allocated to a 'small grants' facility that is accessible to local civil society.

To ensure project implementation as an opportunity for people and ecosystems:

- SLM should remain the priority when setting up financing systems for LDN, and should receive priority support before restoration. LDN involves both aspects, but it is crucial to ensure that resources are not used inefficiently to restore degraded landscapes;
- Caution must be exercised when financing rehabilitation projects so as to ensure that degradation problems are not displaced to other areas;

- Stimulation of or support for land grabbing, land commoditisation and commercialisation and land speculation by financing LDN must be avoided at all costs, and local land rights (formal and informal) must be respected at all times.
- Internationally acknowledged standards and criteria must be respected when financing LDN, and their effective implementation must be guaranteed, especially (but not limited to) the 'Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests' and the principle of 'Free, Prior and Informed Consent';
- An independent grievance mechanism must be created that can easily be approached by local land users regarding LDN projects and land users rights;
- All Parties are encouraged to build the capacities of local people and strengthen land governance institutions to ensure a sound framework to enable effective LDN projects;
- Indigenous mobile pastoralists, fisher folks and small-scale farmers must be protected. Also local food production systems and family farming have to be promoted to ensure sustainable restoration of land in ways that address the socio-economic and environmental perspectives;
- Land tenure of land-using communities must be strengthened and formalised in cooperation between governments, local authorities, CSOs and CBOs;
- Establishment of an LDN outreach and support unit for local people and communities to ensure that they are provided with full and unbiased information and to ensure that decision making processes are informed by real time intelligence from the ground;
- Farmers, technicians and scientists who possess sound knowledge of SLM practices must be assisted to promote and spread their know-how at local level, while the UNCCD and its member states provide general guidelines and resources on LDN objectives;
- Regular assessments must take place to evaluate the impacts of financing LDN projects at different stages, with strong and binding obligations regarding the continuation of the project. The findings of such assessments must also be used to inform the design of future projects to be financed by the LDN system (including Social, Environmental & Human Rights Impacts Assessment, -Plan and -Impact Evaluation).

About the LDN fund - according to our current information:

We need to acknowledge that the LDN Fund, as how we perceive it, is only addressing the restoration of land and not LDN, and presents several failures.

According to the CSOs, this way of financing LDN is not acceptable because:

- Rehabilitation is only one of the three dimensions that must be considered to achieve LDN. If the establishment of an LDN fund is to be considered, preventing and reducing land degradation must also be addressed.
- The percentage allocated to small-scale farmers is neither known nor guaranteed. Therefore the envisaged fund may be directed to rehabilitation of large scale areas. Driven by a business model that seeks for profitable commercial investment, it may not contribute to the objective of reducing poverty and food insecurity, which are core objectives of the UNCCD.
- The envisaged fund may be focused on mitigation of climate change and not adaptation: it must promote family farming and ecological and sustainable agriculture, and not only high added value commercial agricultural models.

UNCCD CSOs



Redactors : Adeline Derkimba, CARI (GTD, ReSaD) – adeline@cariassociation.org
Karin van Boxtel, Both ENDS – k.vanboxtel@bothends.org