In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly declared 17 June as World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (WDCD) with the aim of continuously raising public awareness and drawing attention to issues of land degradation and desertification. The day is celebrated every year around the world and countries actively support and hosts outreach events to highlight the importance of sustainable land management.
The Environmental Monitoring Group celebrated the day with farmers in a recovering landscape at the Avontuur Nature Reserve near Nieuwoudtville in the Northern Cape. Around 50 participants, eager to learn about sustainable land management techniques, attended a Farmer’s Day co-hosted with the Heiveld Cooperative. The participants included small-scale rooibos tea farmers from the area who are members of the Cooperative.
At the start of the workshop, participants were asked to name the natural element that they relate to most strongly, choosing between air, earth, water, and fire, and to explain their choice. One of the participants, Abraham Fortuin explained “Our Father is in heaven and the Earth is where he rests the soles of his feet: I choose Earth because it is where His feet rest”. Participants then shared their rich experience of how best to sustain healthy soils, and what land use practices to avoid.

The programme included compost making and the importance of compost in maintaining healthy and productive soils. The two facilitators of this session, Cynthia and Dustin-Lee explained what the ingredients that are needed for good compost, and explained the management of compost heaps through the various stages of maturity, including maintaining aeration and moisture content, preventing overheating and turning the heaps as needed. the stages of compost, healthy animals and the bacteria found in compost. The participants were also able to view compost heaps on Avontuur and organic garlic production.

Participants visited a land restoration site where the scars of injudicious ploughing could be seen, resulting in extensive topsoil loss and deep gully erosion. Gullies as deep as 2 metres are being rehabilitated through the use of gabions and check-dams. Bare soil surfaces are treated loosening the soil, introducing organic matter and indigenous seeds, and protecting highly erosive soil surfaces with geotextile that traps moisture and seed, allowing the first stages of restoration to take place. Some of the participants had contributed to the first
efforts at restoration on Avontuur, and were delighted to see and share the fruits of their work!

We celebrated with warmth and strong community feeling, despite the cold weather, and everyone gave thanks for the arrival of the very belated winter rains in the previous week.

During other WDCD celebrations in South Africa, the South African Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs, Ms. Barbara Thomson urged South Africans to take responsibility and address poverty, food security and women’s empowerment while linking these to the
importance of productive land for employment opportunities, economic growth and therefore ensuring food security.

Recognizing that South Africa is a signatory to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Deputy Minister emphasized that land degradation forms part of the three pillars of sustainable development and that it is important to mitigate the impacts of land degradation in South African communities. The most vulnerable communities are dependent on land for their livelihoods and combined with the impacts of climate change, it has become imperative that sustainable and smart agriculture techniques are applied to restore and minimize the impacts.

The global observance event was held on 15 June in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change of Burkina Faso. More than 300 participants were in attendance and key note speakers included, President of Burkino Faso, Mr Roch Marc Christian Kabore, Ms Josefa Leonel Correa Sacko, Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union and Ms Monique Barbut, UNCCD. The event included the signing of the Burkino Faso Land Degredation Neutrality Target Setting Programme.

The UNNCCD has released a short film on the theme of WDCD which can be viewed online.

Land Degradation Neutrality: a soil physical calculation that bears potential to open land use planning doors for civil society

By Nathalie van Haren, Both ENDS

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in September 2015. SDG 15 aims at sustaining life on land and includes a target (15.3) that makes explicit reference to land degradation neutrality: “By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation neutral world”. Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) was one of the main issues discussed during the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) COP 12, both in terms of conceptualising and defining LDN, and also in the context of the LDN Fund that was being set up at the time. The UNCCD defines Land Degradation Neutrality 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 parties of the UNCCD have asked the UNCCD Science Policy Interface (SPI) to give guidance on measuring and monitoring LDN in order to support the global discussions (Decision 21/COP.12).
The conceptual framework for LDN

The LDN conceptual framework is designed to be applicable to all land uses (i.e., land managed for production – e.g., agriculture, forestry; for conservation – e.g., protected areas; and also land occupied by human settlements and infrastructure); and all types of land degradation, across the wide variety of countries’ circumstances, so that it can be implemented in a harmonized fashion by all countries that choose to pursue LDN. It helps build the bridge between the vision and the practical implementation of LDN. It is a process framework that captures the vision of what LDN is intended to achieve, and, based on this, provides guidance on how best to assess land degradation and identify appropriate management actions, and ultimately report on progress in achieving LDN.

The Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality unpacks the concept, and defines its objectives, which are to:

- Maintain or improve the sustainable delivery of ecosystem services;
- Maintain or improve productivity, in order to enhance food security;
- Increase resilience of the land and populations dependent on the land;
- Seek synergies with other social, economic and environmental objectives; and
- Reinforce responsible and inclusive governance of land.

*Whilst at the same time:*

- Maintaining or enhancing land-based natural capital: LDN is achieved when the quantity and quality of land-based natural capital is stable or increasing.
• Protecting human rights: Actions taken in pursuit of the LDN target should not compromise the rights of land users (especially small-scale farmers and indigenous populations) to derive economic benefit and increased food security from their activities on the land.

• Respecting national sovereignty: Governments set national targets guided by the global level of ambition while taking into account national circumstances. Governments decide the level of aspiration and how LDN targets are incorporated in national planning processes.

The progress reporting indicators and associated metrics for LDN are:

• Land Cover and land cover change. This can be mapped by using nationally-refined FAO LCCS classes, where change in class may be characterised as positive or negative.

• Land productivity. This can be assessed through estimates of Net Primary Productivity (NPP, in tons Dry Matter per hectare per year: tDM/ha/yr)

• Carbon stocks above and below the soil surface. These can be assessed through estimates of Soil Organic Carbon stock (tons Carbon per hectare: tC/ha, to 30 cm)

Together the 3 indicators give good insight in the physical status of the land. However, gains in one of these indicators cannot compensate for losses in one of the others because all 3
are complementary (not additional) components of land. Therefore, if one of the indicators/metrics shows a negative change, LDN is not achieved, even if the others are substantially positive. Therefore, the one-out, all-out principle is applied. According to the one-out, all-out principle, degradation occurs when (compared with baseline): carbon stock decreases significantly; or land productivity decreases significantly; or negative land cover change occurs.

Principles are provided to govern application of the framework and to help prevent unintended outcomes during implementation and monitoring of LDN. A key issue for governance is the need for safeguards to ensure that vulnerable communities are not displaced when lands are targeted for restoration. The bases for responsible governance towards achieving LDN are the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGTs). The implementation of LDN requires multi-stakeholder engagement and planning across scales and sectors.

**Opportunities for Civil Society Organisations**

In addition to the valuable insights regarding the physical state of the land that are provided by the LDN indicators, the LDN conceptual framework clearly states that civil society should be involved in, and be part of decision making relating to land use planning. Policy makers and policy implementing agencies that deal with land degradation neutrality should:

- Recognise all forms of tenure (public, private, communal, collective, indigenous and customary). This means, when LDN projects are considered in grazing lands, user rights of nomadic people and pastoralists should be recognized.

- Guarantee free, prior and informed consent under the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples & meaningful participation of local communities in consultation and decision-making processes. This means that local people should be involved when an area of land is designated in land use planning as a LDN area (and when an area is designated as a negative LDN area, where land degradation is allowed to take place).

- Ensure that investments do no harm, safeguard against dispossession of legitimate tenure right holders and environmental damage, and should respect human rights. This includes investments from the LDN fund, or other public and private funds.

- Provide safeguards to protect legitimate tenure rights, human rights, livelihoods, food security and the environment from risks that could arise from large-scale transactions in tenure rights. This includes land transactions (co-)funded from the LDN fund, or other public and private funds.

Additional resources on LDN are available below:

1. [Drynet webinar presentation on LDN](October 2016)
2. [Land in balance. The scientific conceptual framework for land degradation neutrality (LDN). Science-Policy Brief 02](October 2016)
3. [Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality](February 2017)
A critical assessment of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund (LDN Fund)

By Nathalie van Haren

The development of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund (LDN Fund) has raised several concerns within the CSO community ranging from a lack of transparency to the identification of Fund beneficiaries.

The notification of the public consultation for the LDN Fund was not well received by civil society as the consultation only focused on the Environmental and Social Standards (E&S standards) of the Fund. Individuals, local communities and civil society were requested to comment on the E&S Standards without insight into the overall governance and policy frameworks of the LDN Fund. The transparency regarding these elements would have shown responsible leadership.

When creating a powerful instrument that is designed to reverse land degradation and promote restoration in a sustainable way, it is imperative to provide the local communities and civil society with sufficient information to engage in ways that are adequately informed to allow constructive criticism. Insight into elements such as the proposed procedures, governance and criteria to promote a positive contribution to stabilizing and reversing land degradation should be made available. In the absence of this information, engaging in the process is like getting only a taste of the cherry on top of the pudding, while the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it.

Our conclusion is that the governance structure and associated social and environmental safeguards that have been developed to date are inadequate to ensure that this instrument will contribute effectively to the protection of the right to food, the promotion of responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests and the sustainable reversal of land degradation. An additional phase of consultation should be offered, inviting scrutiny and comment on the entire LDN Fund governance system and policy framework, including the E&S required positive impacts and the E&S Management System.

In this context, it is crucial that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) should play a responsible leadership role in shaping the process, and ensure that all the necessary checks and balances are in place. As the initiator of the Fund on behalf of the parties to the Convention, the UNCCD has a moral imperative to guarantee that the LDNF will not only ‘do no harm’ but also become a positive instrument that will result in improvements in the quality and sustainability of the livelihoods of land-using communities globally.

Under its current trajectory, withdrawal by the UNCCD for governance of the Fund will mean that there will not be any accountable public control mechanism to ensure that this instrument acts in an ethically acceptable manner.
The RESAD network mobilize civil society of Burkina Faso for consultation and statement on the Paris Agreement and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)

By Patrice Burger

Prior to the involvement of civil society from Burkina Faso in COP22 in Marrakech, SPONG, the representative platform of RESAD in Burkina Faso, organized a preparatory workshop from 19 - 20 October 2016 in Ouagadougou. All of the players in sustainable land management that usually work in project implementation on the ground came to the table: civil society organizations, local authorities and state institutions. During the two days of work, they took time to discuss the broader framework of their interventions, and worked together to develop a statement and recommendations for COP 22.

Recognizing the fundamental role of land in mitigation and adaptation to climate change, the discussions addressed the issue of sustainable land management to be integrated in climate concerns. COP 22, marking the start of the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the civil society organizations of Burkina Faso also raised a number of issues relating to the implementation of the agreement at national level. The workshop enabled them to make the following positions and recommendations.

Land Degradation Neutrality: Implementation in the field

Image: http://www.spong.bf

Workshop participants
The Paris Agreement is the result of high-level talks, held at COP 21 in 2015. While many States have committed themselves vis-à-vis the agreement, following the example of Burkina Faso, which has started its ratification processes, it is clear that the modalities of implementation of the Agreement must be better defined, and that it cannot expect to be implemented without the involvement of local people, especially in rural areas.

To this end, the Burkinabe civil society sees itself as a stakeholder in the implementation of the Agreement and will thus:

- Contribute to the popularization of the Agreement by clarifying its content and conducting information campaigns;
- Establish a committee as a watchdog for its effective implementation and the interpellation of the authorities;
- Contribute to the mobilization of resources in order to support the implementation of Burkina Faso’s commitments under the Paris Agreement;
- Contribute to the review or to the drafting of national development plans of action plans so that they reflect the contributions of civil society.

Finally, the Burkinabe civil society has undertaken to monitor actions taken on the ground in the context of adaptation and mitigation of climate change. It will support the State to recognize, enhance and capitalize the measures implemented in the field by civil society, which already contribute to the implementation of the Agreement.

The concept of neutrality in terms of land degradation and the dedicated fund: remaining questions on the concept and risks related to the fund

The concept of LDN, introduced in the sustainable development objectives of Agenda 2030, is perceived by the stakeholders in the field as a set of practices to reduce land degradation and promote the rehabilitation of those degraded in order to reach a net rate of zero degradation. These practices relate to agriculture, pastoralism and livestock that sustainably preserve the fertility of arable and pastoral land. They have long been known and implemented by actors in rural development and sustainable land management. Civil society organizations wonder what the new concept of LDN will add, beyond its laudable objective of a neutral world in terms of land degradation?

Doubts also persist about the appropriateness of its current definition to the needs and challenges encountered in the field. Indeed, the concept does not seem to take into account issues of scale and dynamics of degradation, restoration and resilience. It does not take into account the complexity of the functioning of ecosystems and their dynamics.

While a fund for the Land Degradation Neutrality will be launched, concerns remain about the concept itself. The current focus of the LDN may even stimulate land degradation in some areas insofar as it offers the possibility of compensation. However, no guarantee has yet been provided to ensure that compensation would be at an equivalent level to the value lost through degradation in terms of ecosystem services.

Regarding the funds dedicated to the LDN, the civil society of Burkina Faso calls for:

- The allocation of funds should be directed toward the restoration of degraded land in the South;
• The intervention on degraded lands must be adapted to the reality and land tenure status of each country;
• Measures must be taken to protect small farmers from land grabbing;
• The LDN funds should not be an instrument of monopolization and financialization of land; but should serve the sustainable development of rural areas and communities that inhabit them;
• The LDN funds must contribute to strengthening women’s access to rural land.

**Strengthening the integration of sustainable land management in the Convention on Climate Change**

Civil society of Burkina Faso reflects the close link between sustainable land management and climate change adaptation. It therefore calls for the inclusion and strengthening of SLM in the agreements, action plans, and climate-related funds. Furthermore, the CSOs call upon the state for a better harmonization framework for the implementation of the Rio conventions.

In Burkina Faso, adaptation to climate change is a challenge that must immediately be taken up in agriculture. Civil society argues that good practices relating to sustainable land management and agro-ecology should be integrated into national agricultural policies. Finally, to help strengthen the integration of SLM into the concerns and climate actions, civil society is committed to:

• Improving communication and synergies of action by developing a knowledge-sharing multilateral network and sharing of SLM and climate change based on achievements;
• Mobilizing resources for the implementation of SLM measures contributing to adaptation to climate change;
• Supporting the research community to validate impact in terms of mitigation and adaptation of SLM practices.

For more information on SPONG for ReSaD, please visit:  http://www.spong.bf/ and http://www.resad-sahel.org/

**LDN implementation in India**

*By Bhawani Shakum*

The activities related to restoration of the degraded lands and halting the processes of desertification have been implemented for a long in India, particularly in the arid zone of Rajasthan in the Western part of India. Here is a brief account of activities implemented by Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS), or “Society for Rural Development”, a local NGO.

• Interventions have included checking soil erosion and runoff, stabilizing sand dunes, plugging gullies, forestation and reforestation under various categories along with harvesting the rainwater. These elements are all part of the current concept of Land Degradation Neutrality.
• The underlying issues include:
• Over-grazing, desertification, over-exploitation of resources and other anthropogenic factors that have created an acute problem of land degradation and added to the process of desertification and the expansion of deserts in the state.

• The satellite data and other studies have shown that the desert sand is drifting and creeping towards the North-East, endangering the productivity of the ‘granary’ of North India

• Located towards the Aravalli ranges in the North East.

• Deforested areas, saline wasteland, sandy wasteland and uncultivable land are cumulatively on the increase in the region.

• People of the area are facing acute problem of paucity of fuel and fodder

• Decline in average rainfall has resulted in serious problems relating to drinking water as the underground water table has decreased by 15 to 40 feet.

• Hence, GBS initiated work to deal effectively with the improvement of land and water resources to solve the problem of safe drinking water as well as access to fuel and fodder by the village communities.

Objectives of GBS Interventions:

• To provide the community people with awareness, education and training on various issues related to protection and improvement of environment,

• To encourage the community people for conservation and optimum utilization of natural resources including land, water and forests through rainwater harvesting, forestation and soil conservation

• To promote and introduce small and appropriate technologies in the villages e.g. vermi-compost, alternative sources of energy, organic manure and pesticides, etc.

Programs and activities

Following were the key activities implemented under the project:

• Harvesting rain water by building check dams in the foot hills and utilising village ponds;

• Conserving soil and moisture by plugging deep gullies and ravines with mud bunds mulched with grasses, bushes and shrubs;

• Planting trees of indigenous species in and around gullies, ravines, sand dunes, wind gaps etc.;

• Stabilizing sand dunes by planting trees, bushes and shrubs in contours, furrows and bench terraces; and

• Protecting roots of indigenous plant species of medicinal value
People’s participation

Camps and training workshops were organized for awareness and education among the community members, particularly the women and youth. They were provided with access to technical knowledge on raising saplings in the nursery, how to stabilize the sand dunes and plugging the gullies to check further degradation of the land etc.

The major achievements include,
- 100,000 fruit, fuel, fodder, timber, shade and flowering trees were planted
- Rain water harvested in check dams and ponds solved the problem of access to water for the people of 6 neighbouring villages
- Level of underground water raised in 10 wells of the area
- Soil and moisture conserved over 1,000 hectares of land
- Problem of fuel and fodder of 500 community members solved
- Thousands of hacked trees of medicinal and other values regenerated
- 120 community women and youth got employment under various activities
- Thirty shifting sand dunes stabilized
- Level of awareness of community people in relation to environment improved
- Youth volunteers trained in nursery and plantation management and rain water harvesting etc.
- Natural habitat developed for hundreds of birds and animals

This project was a successful intervention to advance LDN, and was popularly known as wasteland development. The work was recognized widely and conferred with several national and international awards including the ‘Indira Priyadarshini Vrikshamitra Puraskar’, the biggest national award given by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Government of India and the ‘Ford Conservation and environment Award’. The UNDP made a film about the process and included it in the success stories of wasteland development. The work of the project is on-going and 1,000 - 5,000 trees are planted every year.
FLEUVE is a project supported by the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD as part of the Great Green Wall Initiative in the Sahel region: the Local Environmental Coalition for a Green Union. The project is financed by the European Commission to the tune of Euro 7 million and is being implemented from 2014-18.

FLEUVE aims to strengthen the capacities of local communities to help boost investments in land restoration and create employment opportunities or ‘green jobs’. The project is driven by local people themselves to strengthen community resilience to land degradation, drought and climate variability.

Micro-investment projects are currently being implemented under FLEUVE in 23 communities across five Sahel countries - Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Senegal. The project is complemented by regional-level activities on capacity building and the dissemination of good practices on sustainable land management and innovative financing.

The project is led by the Global Mechanism, with the support of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and three networks of community-based organizations - RESAD, RADDO and Drynet.

Within the framework of FLEUVE project, a regional workshop of local authorities was organized by civil society networks: ReSaD, RADDO and Drynet, supported by CARI and CIEDEL.

This workshop was held from the 27 to 29 September 2016 in Ouagadougou. Participants were invited from Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Chad and Senegal. This regional meeting is part of a process to build an Action-Training module that aims to enhance the transfer of capacities in sustainable land management (SLM) to local authorities, which are considered as the primary “gateways” for any territorial development action.

The Ouagadougou meeting focused on methods of knowledge transmission, in order to identify training tools and facilitation approaches. Those methods will have to be adapted to a targeted public of elected representatives and municipal technicians from rural background.

From the beginning, the Action-Training module scheming has relied on a participative approach and a collaborative effort. Thus, the regional meeting in Ouagadougou has invited executive directors of rural municipalities from the five countries, along with representatives of farm radio stations, training experts and civil society organizations.

The module is structured around four themes, identified as being fairly necessary to implement SLM initiatives:

- Integrating SLM into local planning: building a strategy and designing a territorial project
- Financing SLM projects: innovating and securing resources
- Working with other players: governance and collaborative actions
- Sensitizing on SLM initiatives: innovative communication supports
The module will provide knowledge contents on topics covered by each of these themes. They will also be illustrated by case studies from field projects implemented in the five countries. At last, the module will contain animation tools and methods for every key message, along with training exercises based on case studies.

On all four themes, local authorities will be trained as to build a specific project. At the end of the course, they will have tools and means to act.

During the regional workshop, CSO and training experts have worked on the pedagogic approach of the module and the structuring of its components. They have formulated various methods and tools and tested them on local authorities’ representatives. Adapted ways of transmissions are designed to use pictorial materials as posters and photos. The group proposed utilising participative techniques to involve future trainees in action. Using role-plays, they demonstrated ways in which knowledge can be passed on, and how to conduct a territorial diagnostic exercise.

Gathering local authorities and farm radio representatives was also an opportunity to reinforce their collaborative action in order to inform or sensitize communities on sustainable land management and good practices. Farm radios are not only tools, but unavoidable actors for local development. As a matter of fact, radio remains the best way to reach small-scale farmers. Represenatives of the radio stations and local authorities thus worked together to design an awareness-raising activity on a subject related to SLM topic. Back in their rural community, they will be supported by CSO and the FLEUVE project to implement the activity, thus taking the first step into collaboration to develop their territory.

Closing the meeting, all participants praised the participatory and collaborative approach, as a key feature of the Action-Training module. Once completed, the module will be tested in all five countries in order to be truly adapted to local needs. The final Action-Training module will not be shaped as a locked manual, but rather as a guide including knowledge contents, tools and methods, and various case studies. Future trainers will choose among these contents to adapt their course in order to meet beneficiaries’ expectations.

To pursue the Action-Training effectively, several questions remain to be answered. Once completed, how will the module be certified in the five countries? What are the regulatory proceedings to agree the training by government in order to ensure the module dissemination? The dissemination must also be debated: how to select qualified trainers, able to master the module and to adapt the course? The three civil society networks involved in the FLEUVE project and in the module design were able to draw valuable conclusions from the three-day workshop. Fighting against desertification by improving land management will not only require improved capacities on the part of local authorities. Implementing the Action-Training module will have to take place in a larger frame of support to local authorities and rely on a synergy of action between OSC and municipalities.

Finally the Action Training module will not be efficient in any context where decentralization is not effective and no transfer of resources to the local level has taken place.

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This newsletter is produced by the Drynet Secretariat which is hosted by Environmental Monitoring Group.

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