



Land Degradation Neutrality in the Circum-Sahara: From commitment to implementation

CONTEXT

Two years after the undertake of a global commitment to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), defined through the adoption of target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the official recognition of LDN by the twelfth session of the Conference of the parties (COP12) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the international community will meet again in September 2017 in Ordos, China, for COP13. Held under the theme “Towards a New Generation”, the Conference will be a perfect occasion to pursue discussions on the Land Degradation Neutrality target.

In the perspective of achieving LDN by 2030 and helping countries to understand the methodological and operational aspects of this concept, the UNCCD Secretariat has launched the LDN Target Setting Programme (LDN-TSP). The latter aims to provide countries with technical support (technical advice, expertise and capacity building) for defining LDN baselines and targets. As of today, 110 countries have committed to set LDN targets. The LDN-TSP follows the UNCCD’s « *Towards Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality: turning the concept into practice* » initiative marked with the participation of 14 voluntary countries affected by land degradation” including four countries¹ of the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) zone of action covering about 30 countries in the Sahara and Sahel regions.

Achieving the LDN-TSP objectives will require a paradigm shift in land stewardship from « degrade-abandon-migrate » to « protect-maintain-restore ». In Africa, drought concerns 43% of the continent’s surface area and affects 75% of arable lands and 50% of populations’ livelihoods.

The combination of frequent drought periods and un-planned, unsustainable and inappropriate management has led to the deterioration of Africa’s natural resources.

Efforts to support land degradation reduction and restoration are generally costly, notably in the OSS zone of action. In order to facilitate the achievement of LDN by 2030, an independent « *LDN Fund* » has been announced at the COP21 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris. This Fund aims to mobilize financial resources from private and public institutions to directly and indirectly finance land management and rehabilitation initiatives.

In preparation to COP13 which takes place in Ordos, China, OSS has launched in July 2017 in the framework of the MENA-DELP project an online questionnaire aimed at scientists, policy-makers, managers, researchers, and representatives of the civil society.

In addition to general questions on the state-of-the-art of LDN knowledge, the questionnaire tackled the following themes:

- **LDN implementation at country-level**
- **LDN indicators monitoring-evaluation**
- **LDN financing**

The analysis of the questionnaire results allowed to highlight key information related to the LDN targets and their integration in national policies as well as risks related to their implementation.

This second questionnaire is a logic sequel to the first one launched by OSS in August 2014.

Important to mention that the answers obtained only reflect the vision of scientists, technicians and managers from the OSS zone of action and do not in any way pretend to be representative of any other country/State’s vision.

Note to the Reader :
The following paragraphs present the main results of the questionnaire by theme and the major ideas expressed by the questionnaire contributors.

¹ Algeria, Chad, Ethiopia, Senegal

STATE-OF-THE-ART OF LDN KNOWLEDGE

Achieving LDN will require a paradigm shift in land stewardship from « degrade-abandon-migrate » to « protect-maintain-restore ». Though very well-received both at the international and national levels, the LDN concept needs further simplification for its implementation at the local level. A close collaboration between the national and local levels in this regard is of paramount importance.

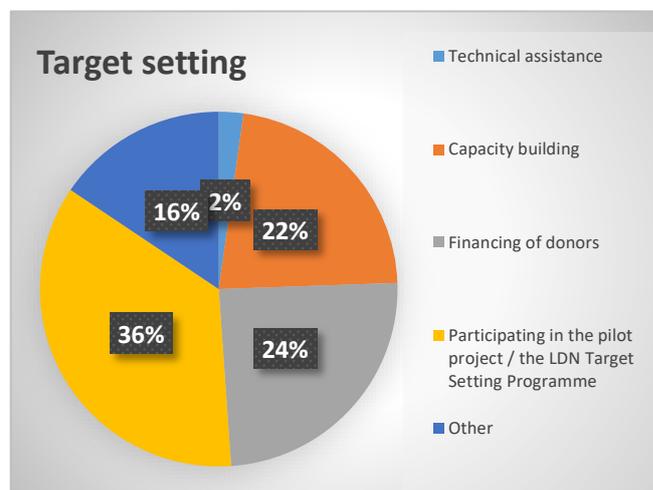
In its implementation, the LDN concept reconciles between development requirements and environment protection. It also contributes simultaneously to climate change mitigation and adaptation and biodiversity protection. These responses to the main environmental concerns threatening ecosystems functions are in tune with the national policies and strategies of most of the Circum-Sahara countries. In addition, agriculture, the main sector concerned by LDN implementation, will contribute to improving the rural populations' livelihoods. The LDN concept raises also some other questions.

As for its major risks, they include, among others, the false interpretation of the LDN definition and land monopolization. These risks could affect the rights of indigenous people and communities in their own environmental space.

- Measure the level of commitments achievement
- Target and promote access to financing resources
- Inform and encourage projects/programmes design and implementation

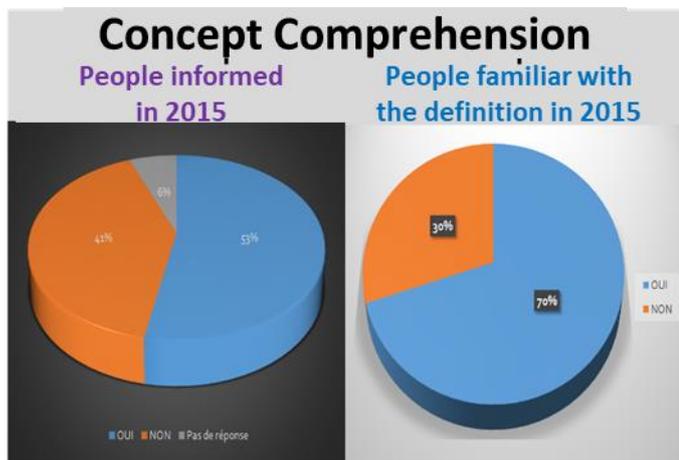
The ownership of the LDN concept will require its integration in national investment strategic frameworks and action plans to combat desertification and the promotion of public-private partnership in combatting land degradation.

Participation in the LDN pilot project or Target Setting Programme (TSP) is a determining factor in countries voluntary commitments. Capacity building and financial assistance are also important for the LDN implementation process.



Despite countries participation in the LDN-TSP, certain limits and obstacles have been identified at different levels, namely:

- Difficulties in translating the LDN concept into concrete actions
- Inadequate technical capacities of national institutions
- Insufficient financial means



LDN AT COUNTRY LEVEL

With a view to meeting the SDGs in a synergistic and profitable manner, countries are formulating their voluntary LDN targets in accordance with their national context and development priorities.

LDN implementation entails the commitment of multiple actors and efficient planning at different levels of decision-making and sectors, supported by national coordination.

The definition of specific LDN targets will enable countries to:

- Identify the type of action needed

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF LDN INDICATORS

The new component of LDN which distinguishes it from previous efforts to combat land degradation consists in the adoption of neutrality as a target. In order to assess if the LDN target is achieved, the UNCCD has set three global indicators which are: land cover change, land productivity and below and above-ground carbon stocks.

To this end, the countries of the Circum-Saharan region have developed several natural resources management tools and environmental monitoring and evaluation systems.

However, not many countries have land cover map to monitor spatio-temporal changes and the capacities to assess below and above-ground carbon stocks.



In this light, several countries need assistance at different levels to be more efficient in national surveillance and monitoring of LDN indicators. This assistance could be in the form of:

- Capacity building activities
- Support to the development of new monitoring tools and databases
- Exchange of good practices in matter of monitoring-evaluation.

LDN FINANCING

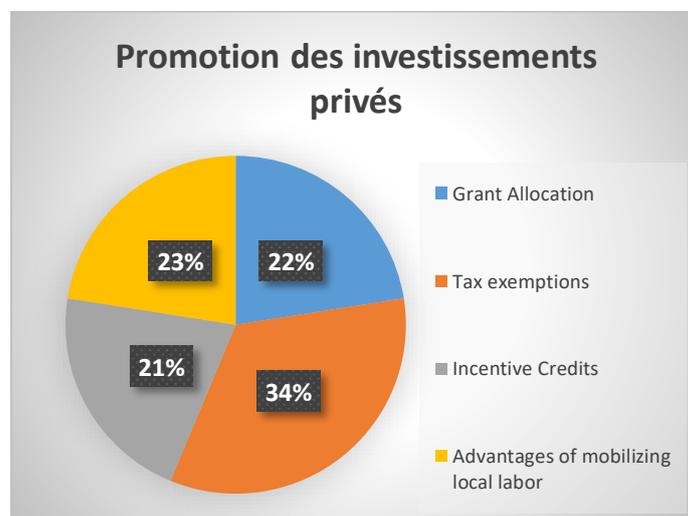
The implementation of Land Degradation Neutrality requires the mobilization of considerable financial resources as, due to limited financial means, countries are generally reluctant to finance land degradation and restoration activities from their own national budget.

That is why most of the countries resort to the private sector and climate funds to finance LDN initiatives. As investment in sustainable land management takes time to pay off, it is very unlikely to see traditional development financial resources finance LDN activities and actions.

In order to overcome these constraints and address the LDN challenge, a partnership was concluded between MIROVA² and the UNCCD for the creation of an LDN specific fund to be based mainly on private funds. This Fund aims to restore 12 million hectares of lands per year in the world. However, the integration of private funds in the management of a highly crucial resource as land may generate certain risks unless it is well-organized. These risks are:

- Land expropriation
- Abandonment of family farming and endorsement of agroforestry
- Encouraging land degradation to restore other lands
- Monopolization of restored lands

This Fund could be properly structured by promoting a public-private partnership and taking incentive measures to encourage investments in the private sector. These measures may include grants allocation, tax exemption, and reduced rate loans.



² Mirova, a wholly owned subsidiary of Natixis Asset Management, is a leading asset manager dedicated to responsible investing.

CONCLUSION

The questionnaire allowed to collect the views of different partners and actors involved in different development sectors in the Circum-Sahara region. In fact, by adopting LDN and contributing to LDN national and international targets, countries could play an important role in the resolution of certain environmental challenges facing the world today.

However, certain issues need to be clarified so that countries could implement the LDN concept. It is also very important to better understand how LDN could be implemented by the different sectors and to identify the type of actions needed. In brief, it is very crucial to have clear definitions, indicators, tools and monitoring capacities for an efficient implementation of Land Degradation Neutrality.

Contributed to this questionnaire

ABAKAR SOULEYMANE Hamid (Agence Nationale de la Météorologie/Tchad), ABO RAGAB Samy (DRC/Egypte), ALOUI Hamda (MALE/Tunisie), BAGAN Thomas (Port Autonome de Cotonou/Benin), BAH Fatoumata (UMLT/Tunisie), BAMBANZE Vital (UNIPROBA/Burundi), BELLO Abdoukarim (OSS/Tunisie), BEN ATIG Faiza (Scet-Tunisie), BEN KHATRA Nabil (OSS/Tunisie), BEN ROMDHANE Abir (OSS/Tunisie), BEN SAID Mohamed (DGQEV/Tunisie), BENADJILA Sofane (Consultant Indépendant/Algérie), BIED-CHARRETON Marc (CSFD/France), CHENEVAL Jean-Baptiste (CARI/France), CHIAB Ismail (FLSH Sfax/Tunisie), COULIBALY Diakaridia (Direction Nationale de l'Agriculture/Mali), DIAGNE Papa Nékhrou (Institut National de Pédologie/Sénégal), DJEMOUAI Kamal (Indépendant/Algérie), DOUNIA Sandjima (MAEP/Tchad), DRIDI Leila (OSS/Tunisie), DRIDI Mohamed Ali (MALE/Tunisie), ELYES Ben aoun (ASOC/Tunisie), GHEZAL Hela (OSS/Tunisie), GIRARD Henri (ONG Terre Verte/Burkina Faso), HAJIBI Abdessamad (haut-commissariat aux eaux et forêts et à la lutte contre la désertification/Maroc), HAMADA Nabil (OSS/Tunisie), HICHERI Dalila (OSS/Tunisie), JAOUI Khaoula (OSS/Tunisie), KABIRI Lahcen (FSTE-UMI- AOFEP-RADDO/Maroc), KADI Mohammed (Consultant/Algérie), KARBO Atahirou (ministère de l'hydraulique et de l'assainissement/Niger), KONE Samou (OSS/Tunisie), LABANE Yadh (Consultant/Tunisie), LABIADH Moez (OSS/Tunisie), MAKANGUILE Aboubacar (DEGUESSI VERT S.A.R.L./Mali), MANE Famara (OSS/Tunisie), MIMOUNI Mustapha (OSS/Tunisie), MOHAMED ALI Ahmed (Direction de l'Agriculture et des Forêts/Djibouti), OU-ADI Ismail (FST/Maroc), RANA MUHAISEN Rana (NCARE/Jordanie), SANOU Issiaka, SCHIFFERER Hartmut (OSS/Tunisie), SGHAIER Mongi (Institut des Régions Arides/Tunisie), SIDI Ahmed Cheine (Tenmiya/Mauritanie), SY El hadj (Direction Nationale Eaux et Forêts/Mali), TAIBI Rachid (OSS/Tunisie), TIDJANI Adamou Didier (Faculté d'agronomie de l'université Abdou moumouni de Niamey/ Niger), TRAORE Mamadou (Association prévention et coachindg des catastrophes et biodiversité/Mali), ZANGAR Imen (OSS/Tunisie), ZEMAL Housseem Eddine (Direction des services agricoles de KHENCHELA/Algérie), ZEMIRLI Merouane (Direction Générale des Forêts/Algérie), ZOUNGRANA Evens (OSS/Tunisie).

