POSITION PAPER

IUCN's key messages UNCCD COP13

6 – 16 September, 2017, Ordos, China[i]

Executive summary

Drylands are globally important areas that are home to more than a third of humanity, including many of the world's poorest populations. Restoring, rehabilitating, and sustainably managing dryland ecosystems is a high priority for equitably achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving SDG Target 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) will be a major step in the transition towards global sustainability.

LDN requires policies and investments that protect biodiversity and ecosystems in drylands, particularly soil biodiversity as the foundation of land productivity, water cycles, and of carbon sequestration and storage. LDN should be achieved in ways that uphold local resource rights and governance and contribute to overall sustainable development and multiple SDGs. Investment in restoring and sustainably managing land should be given greater priority considering the importance of healthy land (SDG 15) for reducing poverty (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), water security (SDG 6), economic growth (SDG 8), and climate change mitigation and adaptation (SDG 13). Investments in achieving LDN should also contribute to gender equality (SDG 5), peace and justice (SDG 16) among other goals[ii].

Equitable and environmentally sound attainment of LDN requires investment in all types of land and land use, including grasslands, forests, agricultural land, wetlands and others.

- ✓ **Parties are urged to adopt the revised Strategic Framework of the convention** and to mobilize greater action to deliver LDN by 2030.
- ✓ **Parties are also encouraged to build on the clearly established synergy between the Convention and the sister Rio Conventions** in order to achieve greater impact through integrated approaches and the multifunctional use of land.

Specifically, IUCN recommends Parties to the Convention to:

- Establish voluntary national targets for LDN, adhering closely to published guidelines on LDN Target Setting
- Integrate gender in the planning and implementation of LDN
- Give greater priority to investments and other actions that contribute to LDN targets, recognizing the high value of investments in multi-functional land use
- Build synergy and cost effectiveness by aligning landscape restoration commitments and LDN
- Use integrated landscape and ecosystem based approaches to build resilience
- Examine the use of established methodologies to prioritize actions for delivering LDN
- Mobilize finance to urgently implement large-scale restoration at the landscape level and sustainable land management actions that deliver against LDN targets
- Strengthen governance and rights as a foundation for sustainable land management, including the resource access and management rights of local land users
- Develop policies and strategies to maintain or increase soil organic carbon and soil biodiversity and monitor their implementation
- Invest in restoring and sustainably managing dryland ecosystems in order to reduce the frequency and severity of drought and sand and dust storms

IUCN's engagement in the UNCCD responds multiple resolutions and recommendations from members, to combat desertification, to address the specific conservation and restoration needs of drylands, and to sustainably use soils. All IUCN state members are signatories to the Convention and many are officially affected by desertification.

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Drylands are not Wastelands: background information[iii]

Drylands cover 41% of all land and include unique habitats such as Savannahs, steppe, mist forests and oases. They support one third of the Global Conservation Hotspot Area and are home to 28% of endangered species.

Soil is the most biologically diverse component of our planet with a vast abundance and diversity of living organisms. Soil biodiversity and related organic matter regulates the major global biogeochemical processes, like the carbon, nitrogen and water cycles. Soil biodiversity is therefore a major determinant of land productivity and of carbon sequestration and storage, and it is the foundation of the resilience of societies and ecosystems.

However, dryland soils are particularly slow to form and at high risk of erosion due to loss of biodiversity. Between one quarter and one third of all drylands worldwide are affected by land degradation.

One third of the world's population lives in the drylands, and 90% of dryland people live in developing countries. A large part of the dryland population is urban and many people live in large cities like Mexico City, Cairo and Karachi: these people depend on dryland ecosystems for their welfare, from food and water supply to recreation and health.

Drylands include 44% of the world's cultivated systems and provide 50% of the world's livestock output. Despite their name, drylands also play a major role in the supply of water and over a third of the world's major river basins are situated at least 50% in drylands. However, average per capita availability of water in drylands is a third below the minimum requirement for human needs. Desertification exacerbates the loss of water by reducing infiltration and increasing runoff.

By aggravating water losses, desertification contributes to the severity and the frequency of drought. Additionally, climate change is projected to reduce water availability and quality in drylands over the next 40 years by 10-30%, while extreme weather events (e.g. droughts and floods) will increase in number and intensity. Soil biodiversity provides a steady source of livelihood through which people can be better equipped to absorb the shocks of a disaster and also supports land to recover at a faster rate from the direct damages of disaster events.

Additionally, 36% of global terrestrial carbon is stored in drylands, mostly in dryland soils. Restoring and rehabilitating land and achieving LDN will therefore contribute significantly to cutting greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing Carbon stocks.

Responding to the challenge of "sustaining the global food supply and conserving nature"

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a vital mechanism in the global effort to achieve sustainability. The target of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) will be achieved by restoring or rehabilitating, protecting and sustainably managing land in order to safeguard the many services that land provides to human society. In this way, LDN will contribute not only to Sustainable Development Goal 15 on terrestrial ecosystems, but also to goals on poverty reduction (SDG1), food (SDG2) and water security (SDG6), employment and economic growth (SDG8), and climate action (SDG13).

Achieving LDN requires greater respect for biodiversity and ecosystems, including recognition of the role of soil biodiversity as the foundation of ecosystem services.

Achieving LDN also requires concerted effort to uphold the rights of indigenous people, communities and small holders to natural resources. Strengthening natural resource rights further contributes to other Sustainable Development Goals, including gender equality (SDG5) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16) amongst others.

Delivering LDN requires the development and use of supporting science, greater inclusion of local knowledge and institutions, and stronger governance and policies at all levels.

IUCN, as a Union of States and Non-Governmental organizations, contributes to addressing these requirements in a number of ways including:

1. Establishing knowledge products, including the Red List of Ecosystems and the Red List of Threatened Species;
2. Developing multi-objective methodologies that envision solutions at the landscape level, like the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM);
3. Innovating in restoration, rehabilitation and sustainable land management, including Ecosystem Based Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction, participatory rangeland restoration, and forest landscape restoration;
4. Strengthening governance, policy, legal instruments, and institutions from local to global level; and
5. Convening partnerships for integrated action on the ground.

IUCN's position, UNCCD COP13

The Hawaii Commitments of the IUCN World Conservation Congress (2016) recognize that safeguarding the environment cannot be achieved at the expense of development, particularly in the poorest and most food insecure regions. However, nature and ecosystems must be safeguarded as the basis for food production and economic growth. Balancing these apparently competing priorities will be key to achieving, and then surpassing, the Sustainable Development Goals. With respect to Agenda item 2 (the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development):

- ✓ **IUCN urges Parties to complete the process of establishing LDN targets and to mobilize responses to deliver those targets in the proposed time frame.** This requires a balanced response to degradation in all types of land and land use, including grasslands, forests, agricultural land, wetlands and others. IUCN will continue to support countries to establish and to monitor LDN targets and to deliver LDN, through restoration, rehabilitation, and sustainable management of land.

More specifically, IUCN recommends that Parties:

With respect to agenda item 3 (effective implementation of the Convention at national, sub-regional and regional level):

- ✓ **Establish voluntary national targets for LDN, adhering closely to published guidelines on LDN Target Setting**, which include recommendations published through consultation with a wide range of IUCN members. These include:

1. Making integrated ecosystem management approaches central to achieving LDN
2. Strengthening local natural resource governance to enable equitable LDN outcomes
3. Integrating gender in the planning and implementation of LDN
4. Generating evidence and effectively monitoring progress towards LDN
5. Building on the synergy between LDN and other conservation approaches and targets
6. Developing innovative financing mechanisms for action towards LDN

- ✓ **Give greater priority to actions that contribute to achieving LDN, recognizing the high value of investments in multi-functional land use.** This can be facilitated by strengthening cross-sectoral mechanisms for landscape management to better capture the multiple benefits of healthy land. **Government enabling conditions also need to be in place** to allow implementation of actions and investments towards the accomplishment of LDN targets.

With respect to agenda item 5a (high-level Round Table 1 on Land degradation and Round Table 3 "From targets to action")

- ✓ **Build synergy and cost effectiveness by aligning landscape restoration commitments and LDN.** Landscape restoration and ecosystem restoration make major contributions to achieving LDN targets as well as achieving NDCs and Aichi Targets. This includes pledges to sustainable land management and landscape restoration, like the Bonn Challenge, a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030. It also includes Bonn Challenge regional-supportive initiatives such as AFR100 in Africa and Initiative 20x20 in Latin America, as well as other important initiatives such as the Great Green Wall. IUCN encourages dryland countries to join the Bonn Challenge as a way of making a significant contribution to global targets through restoration of dryland ecosystems.
- ✓ **Use landscape and ecosystem based approaches to address desertification challenges, build resilience to climate change and disaster risks, and enhance biodiversity.** Landscape restoration and ecosystem based approaches can be adapted to national and sub-national priorities and local conditions to restore ecological functionality and enhance human well-being across degraded and deforested landscapes.
- ✓ **Examine the use of established methodologies to prioritize actions for delivering LDN.** ROAM offers an adaptable framework for determining restoration potential and associated interventions, including recognizing the high value of investments that optimize the multiple services and goods which can be provided at a landscape scale. This can be facilitated by strengthening cross-sectoral mechanisms for landscape management to better capture the multiple benefits of healthy and productive lands.
- ✓ **Mobilize finance to implement large-scale landscape restoration and sustainable land management** actions that deliver against LDN targets, and **create enabling conditions for local innovation and entrepreneurship, and for the growth of small and medium sized enterprises**. This can be facilitated by improving knowledge of the range of values derived from such investments, and developing innovative financing mechanisms that invest in the multi-functionality of land. **Investments are also needed in human development in many dryland regions** and

considerable progress can be made simply by boosting investment in dryland people, promoting their knowledge and strengthening their institutions.

With respect to agenda item 5b (Gender and land rights);

- ✓ **Strengthen governance and rights as a foundation for sustainable land management,** including the resource access and management rights of local land users. This includes the development of supporting legal instruments to achieve LDN.
- ✓ **Build on the Gender Advocacy Policy Framework**, and decision 9/COP.10 (paragraph 10) inviting the Executive Secretary, in light of the advocacy policy framework on gender, to undertake advocacy with Parties. The UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Plan provides an important opportunity to ensure meaningful mainstreaming of gender for realizing the goals of the Convention, and particularly for achieving LDN.

With respect to agenda item 2b (the future strategic framework of the Convention)

- ✓ **Develop policies to incentivize conservation of Soil Organic Carbon and associated soil biodiversity** and monitor their implementation. This includes monitoring the contribution of Soil Organic Carbon to multiple Sustainable Development Goals, including food and water security, and climate change mitigation and adaptation, and several of the Aichi Targets. Restoring and protecting Soil Organic Carbon can be achieved through approaches that promote soil biodiversity, including minimizing tillage, maintaining vegetation cover, and incorporating organic matter in crop lands.

With respect to agenda item 5a (Round Table 2 on Drought and Sand and Dust Storms)

- ✓ **Invest in restoring or rehabilitating and sustainably managing dryland ecosystems in order to reduce the frequency and severity of drought and sand and dust storms**. Ecosystem-based approaches to disaster risk reduction and adaptation work by restoring natural systems as a way to buffer the impacts of climate change, maintain the resilience of natural ecosystems, and help people and communities adapt to changing conditions. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction pays limited attention to land degradation and drought, but it provides a mechanism to raise the profile of these slow onset disasters.

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[i] Official COP Documents: http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/official-documents/Pages/SessionDisplay.aspx?k=COP(13)/CST

[ii] IUCN, 2015. Land Degradation Neutrality: implications and opportunities for conservation https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/tech_brief_land_degradation_neutrality_ver_2016.pdf

[iii] IUCN, 2012. Conserving Dryland Biodiversity. https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/conserving_drylands_biodiversity_iucn_unccd_book_0.pdf