

SOILS AND LAND IN THE SDGs AND THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

A proposal for a goal to achieve a Land Degradation Neutral World in the context of sustainable development

The Rio+20 sustainable development conference launched a process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and put the ambitious agreement on the global political agenda to strive to achieve a land degradation neutral world (LDNW) in the context of sustainable development (“The Future We Want”, A/RES/66/288). This agreement sends a strong political signal that the world has to minimize land degradation and it has to balance unavoidable land degradation by strict efforts on land restoration. This agreement was further highlighted by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons in its report “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and transform Economies through Sustainable Development” (p.49) and by the Open Working Group on SDGs at its 3rd session (22 – 24 May 2013).

Since the beginning of 2013, several initiatives have addressed the issue of land and soils within the SDGs and the post-2015 Development Agenda: The Sustainable Development Solutions Network in its “Action Agenda for Sustainable Development” report highlights the need to address land and soils for sustainable agriculture and food production, the Global Soil Partnership set up a specific working group within the newly created Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils to address soils in the SDGs from a food security perspective (ITPS first meeting report) and more recently, the COP 11 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has decided to establish an intergovernmental working group addressing this issue in drylands (ICCD/COP(11)/L.19).

These initiatives cover important aspects of soils and land for sustainable development; however, there is still a need to bring these initiatives together to develop a non-sectoral approach that is not limited to specific regions. This approach needs to be in line with the level of ambition agreed in Rio+20. One of the most crucial questions in the context linked to the achievement of a LDNW is the question of quantifiable and qualitative targets and indicators that are appropriate in order to catalyze actions. At the same time, a new global sustainable development agenda will have to find ways to integrate and link to the global poverty agenda, most prominently addressed in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). An approach that tackles challenges both for people and for the planet and which offers opportunities for participation by different stakeholders from around the world has been called for as documented by the United Nations in the report “A Million Voices: The World We Want”.

In view of this and following up on the discussions held at the first Global Soil Week 2012, a workshop was held at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam, Germany, with the title: “Putting Soils and Land on the SDGs Agenda: defining potential indicators”. The aim



was to address the role of soils and land in the process of the development of the SDGs with a focus on a LDNW. This workshop brought together the different communities for instance from the field of soils, land, science, policy and NGOs. These communities have continued working together and involving further stakeholders to develop the ideas discussed. This paper presents these ideas and includes a proposal on a set of illustrative LDNW targets and sub-targets of physical and socio-economic nature.

Magnitude and seriousness of the soil and land degradation issue

It is widely accepted in the scientific and political community that soil and land degradation poses a great challenge for sustainable development. The world is losing approximately 24 billion tons of fertile top soil every year because of wind or water erosion. Due to its linkages to other natural resources, soils need to be considered as an integral component of the water, energy and food security nexus. A projected population of 9 billion by 2050 and changing consumption patterns as well as climate change are putting additional pressure on our land and soil resources.

Soil and land degradation is not a solely physical and biochemical issue. It is very often linked to socio-economic aspects. For instance, poor and marginalized populations are usually the most affected. Achieving food security for poor small-scale farming communities and eradicating extreme poverty requires action against land degradation as they are the ones usually occupying degraded land. Moreover, soil and land degradation is as much a governance issue as it is a technical one. This means security of access to land must also be addressed. Actions towards land restoration will not be effective for sustainable development if they do not take into account the specific needs of poor people and vulnerable groups.

A Land Degradation Neutral World needs to be people-centered

A people-centered approach for a LDNW has implications at two stages: 1) the development of targets and indicators and 2) the implementation of actions. A people-centered approach for the development of LDNW targets and indicators is necessary in order to respond to current and changing characteristics of the world we live in. Environmental issues are increasing in extent and severity as a result from the pressure put by our societies on natural resources around the globe. At the same time, social and economic inequalities are one of the main challenges we are facing. A LDNW must be based on both a joint bottom-up trajectory and a supportive top-down approach through international commitments.

Achieving a LDNW requires collective actions. Actions to reduce degradation and restore land in the context of sustainable development should work in favor of poor populations and marginalized groups. Local communities have to be involved. Their needs have to guide the process since they are the main actors implementing action in the field. Farming communities can reduce land degradation within local community boundaries, supported by appropriate policies, investments and incentives. A business as usual approach and the repetition of the debates of the past will not empower us to achieve a LDNW.

A LDNW approach has to be knowledge-based

Existing assessments and studies provide a wealth of information on the magnitude of the problem of land and soil degradation. At the same time, there is a general acknowledgement of the need for more standardized monitoring systems around the world. However, the absence of complete data

sets on the state of the issue should not prevent us from jump-starting a global process to achieve a LDNW. We have to improve monitoring and assessments of the state of these resources and their response to different types of use. The inclusion of soil and land resources in the SDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda can contribute to reinforcing the demand for soil and land information at both local and global scale.

A proposal for LDNW targets and sub-targets

The overarching agreement in Rio+20 was to strive for a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development. However, acknowledging the complexity of the SDG setting process as well as the great amount of issues that need to be addresses, we have chosen to focus on a target and sub-target level. This means the following proposal is meant to be applicable also to other goals, for instance on food security or sustainable agriculture.

The proposed targets and sub-targets are divided into 4 main sub-groups, as follows¹:

DEGRADATION	RESTORATION	LAND-USE CHANGE	SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS AND POVERTY
TARGETS			
Reduce by 2030 the annual rate of land degradation by 50%	Restore by 2030 an annual amount of degraded land equivalent to the annual amount of land degraded in order to avoid a net-loss of land-generated ecosystem services provided to society	Reduce by 2030 urban sprawl, peatland conversion, and deforestation rates by 50%	Ensure that the rural and urban poor benefit from actions towards a LDNW in order to end poverty and increase resilience ²
SUB-TARGETS			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduce by 50% the amount of soil being eroded by wind and water 2. Reduce by 50% the area affected by inappropriate nutrient management 3. Reduce by 50% the annual rate of additional human induced salinization 4. Reduce by 50% the input of polluting substances to soil 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By 2030, all countries have completed a national ecosystem assessment 2. By 2030, all countries have established a national accounting system that is equally based on economic, environmental and social accounting 3. By 2030, countries that have completed their national ecosystem assessment, have tested quantifiable indicators for soil productivity, soil water storage capacity and soil organic matter content 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By 2030 reduce by 50% land take rates owing to human activity resulting in soil sealing (in particular urban development for housing, services or recreation, and industrial, commercial and transport networks and infrastructure) 2. By 2030 reduce by 50% the rate of peatland conversion 3. By 2030 reduce by 50% deforestation rates 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bring down by 80% the number of land related conflicts by 2030 2. Ensure that by 2030 75% of restoration activities target people living below their country's 2015 national poverty line 3. Increase by 2030 at least 40% the share of women and men with equal and secure access to land

¹ The targets and sub-targets are illustrative in the sense that they depict the current state of an ongoing debate which can be further developed. The main topics, however, reflect what we consider the main aspects of a LDNW

² As per Goal 1 of the HLPEP report

The Global Soil Week 2013 (www.globalsoilweek.org) will discuss possible ways to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality and support a process to develop a common position by the soils and land community

The authors of this document look forward to discussing this proposal with stakeholders at all levels to support the ongoing development of the SDGs and the post- 2015 Development Agenda. The aim of sharing this proposal is to bring together the land and soil communities and to collaborate in a process to join forces amongst current initiatives to put soil and land resources on the global sustainable development agenda. Stakeholders from around the world will come together at the second Global Soil Week “Losing Ground?” (27-31 October 2013, in Berlin) within the framework of a session titled “Soils and Land in the Sustainable Development Goals – A proposal for global targets and indicators”.

**A longer background document of this proposal will be made available soon.
For more information visit www.globalsoilweek.org**

Authors*:

Dr. Knut Ehlers
UBA - German Federal Environment Agency, Germany
Ivonne Lobos Alva
IASS - Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Germany
Dr. Luca Montanarella
EC-JRC - European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Italy
Alexander Müller
IASS - Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Germany
Dr. des. Jes Weigelt
IASS - Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Germany

Contributing authors*:

Dr. Alok Adholeya
TERI - the Energy and Resource Institute, India
Dr. Deborah Bossio
CIAT, CGIAR - International Center for Tropical Agriculture, Kenya
Geertrui Louwagie
EEA - European Environment Agency, Denmark
Martin Rokitzki
Oxfam, UK
Prof. Uriel Safriel
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
Dr. Mary Seely
DRFN - Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Namibia
Dr. Remy Sietchiping
UN-Habitat - United Nations Human Settlements Programme, Kenya
Sergio Zelaya
UNCCD - United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, IGO

*In alphabetical order