

Land as integrator and accelerator for SDGs

Context

In 2015, countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Leaving no one behind implies a stronger coordination and concerted efforts by all partners to achieve SDGs by 2030. It also implies a shift away from working in silos to minimize potential overlaps and ensure synergies. On a financial point of view, it is estimated more than 4.5 trillion USD are required every year to meet the SDGs. However, according to the World Bank, annual funding gap for reaching all 17 SDGs by 2030 totals about \$2.5 trillion. Given such limited resources available, it is even more vital that we fully harness the synergies between the SDGs and their respective targets.

Land as integrator and accelerator

Land serves as a robust platform for integrating and accelerating achievement and impacts of various SDGs, by generating multiple benefits in a highly cost-effective manner. While working landscapes are often ignored, they act as a foundation for real sustainability and for all of the SDGs – not mentioning that achieving the overarching goals for sustainable development is unrealistic if we do not secure the ground beneath our feet. Reversing the trend of losing 12 million hectares each year to degradation processes and achieving robust sustainable management and restoration of landscapes (SDG 15) has the potential to deliver several co-benefits, ranging from climate change adaptation and mitigation to food and water security, to creation of decent jobs.

For instance, multiplier effects for zero hunger through food security (SDG 2), employment (SDG 8), learning (SDG 4, 5) and poverty reduction (SDG 1) can be garnered by smart and sustainable land management interventions. Sustainable agriculture is known to have tremendous potential to alleviate poverty while generating quality employment opportunities. By switching to sustainable agriculture practices, agroforestry, and other sustainable land uses, we can create over 200 million full-time jobs in food production systems alone by 2050. Furthermore, sustainable forest management, eco-tourism, and clean energy production can create numerous jobs that are attractive and lucrative to young people.

Today, as we know that approximately 800 million people are chronically undernourished worldwide; and more than a half of total global agricultural land is degraded, reducing its productivity day-by-day. By adopting sustainable land management practices, it could help land reach its potential to generate crop yield and deliver 2.3 billion tons of additional production. Furthermore, sustainable land management can minimize the negative impacts of conventional agriculture. According to the World Health Organization, about 3 million severe pesticide poisoning incidents occur globally on an annual basis. A quarter million people die, who are mostly from low and middle-income countries from it. By reducing and better using external

inputs, sustainable land management can lead to improved nutrient availability as well as water in the soil, while preventing the harms to populations dependent on land.

At the same time, sustainable land management postulates the recognition of land not only as an instrumental component in achieving SDGs but also as the locale in which communities exist. This calls for an appreciation of the organic relationship between land and people, necessitating the safeguard of legal and customary rights in land as well as institutionalizing mechanisms for public consultation and participation in decision-making on matters related to land use.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

The UNCCD is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. UNCCD's goal is to restore the productivity of vast expanses of degraded land, improve the livelihoods of more than 1.3 billion people living on degraded lands, and reduce the impacts of drought on vulnerable populations.

The UNCCD is also the United Nations' custodian agency for the implementation of SDG 15.3 "Combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world." Within this mandate, UNCCD supports 197 country Parties in establishing national Land Degradation Neutrality targets, which aim at achieving an adequate balance between three processes: degradation, rehabilitation/restoration and sustainable land management. The goal is that by 2030, countries will have attained a status, whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remains stable or increases. Today, 120 countries are formally engaged in the process, and a number among these latest have already set their targets and are developing practical transformative projects to reach their goals.

Harnessing the power of partnerships

Despite encouraging trends in addressing land degradation worldwide, much remains to be done. Achieving the ambition of the 2030 Agenda, in particular, calls for the development of partnerships between key stakeholders, agencies and partners. The goals of the three Rio Conventions - the UNCCD, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – are closely interlinked, and therefore the collective action is needed on the ground to achieve the desired goals.

Implementing the SDGs on the ground also requires stronger partnerships between public and private actors to enhance the synergistic use of public and private capital in tackling global challenges. Founded on this idea, the UNCCD has spearheaded the creation of an impact investment vehicle –LDN Fund that puts together private and public capital to address land degradation worldwide. The LDN Fund takes a blended finance approach to adjust the risk-return balance of the investment opportunities in order to incentivize private investors to invest in sustainable land management projects.

Main objectives of the Thematic Track

The aim of the thematic track will be to look smart land policies, land tenure system, best practices, innovative technologies and financing opportunities that would harness the power of partnerships to restore or better manage land to deliver multiple co-benefits, practically showing how land can act as an integrator and an accelerator for achieving the global ambition enshrined in 2030 Agenda. Panelists will successively present their views linked to land and poverty alleviation, land and renewable energy, land and food and water security, and land and functional ecosystems.

The discussions following presentations by panelists will focus on our ability to promote an integrated approach and ensure synergies at a landscape scale, which will be determinant for the future of many vital resources such as soil, food, water, energy, biodiversity, and ecosystem sustainability.