LAND DEGRADATION & RESTORATION BACKGROUND PAPER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Combating land degradation to promote sustainability, resilience and food security

Land degradation and desertification (LDD) are increasing with alarming effects in the Near East and North Africa (NENA region), and is impacting the livelihoods of communities, their food security and likelihood of migration. The process is influenced by the socio-economic dynamic and conflict and is aggravated by climate change. The paper elaborates on the status, challenges and drivers of LDD. Opportunities exist to reverse the trend, which are supported by the global momentum to achieve a land degradation neutral world and the commitments related to climate change and biodiversity. Proper planning, prioritization of target areas for restoration and actions on the ground are all needed to foster the adoption of sustainable land and water management options and to enhance a conducive enabling environment. Some knowledge gaps still exist. The paper clarifies the inter-linkages between land degradation, sustainability of livelihoods and food security under different scenarios of climate change, and how these influence the likelihood of migration.

Land Degradation Neutrality is part of the SDGs: At the **UNCCD COP12**, held in Ankara (October 2015), country Parties reached a breakthrough agreement to link the implementation of the Convention to the SDGs in general, and **target 15.3** in particular, which states: ***"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"***. **Target 15.3** has therefore become a strong vehicle for driving **UNCCD** implementation. Other SDGs are closely related to this target, including indicators on soil and land, such as SDG 2 - End hunger and achieve sustainable agriculture; SDG 6 - Protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes. This includes identification of impacts of land degradation in the provision of ecosystem services. The GEF is committed to support countries to implement the Convention and facilitate coordinated investments in Sustainable Land Management (SLM) to achieve LDN.

CHALLENGES

LDD affect around **1/3 of the land** used for agriculture

About **1.5 billion** people worldwide, are affected by LDD

Sources: WBG, UNCCD

OPPORTUNITIES

Globally over **2 billion hectares** can be subject to restoration and rehabilitation through the application of SLM techniques

In the NENA region, about **350 million hectares** are potentially suitable for sustainable management practices

In Asia, SLM investments are worth about **USD 3 billion**

In Africa, actions against soil erosion can generate benefits of about **USD 2.48 trillion**

Sources: WRI, ICARDA, ELD

Innovation for Food and Water Security in the Near East and North Africa Region

Desertification is nowhere more serious than in the NENA region. Soil erosion results in losses of soil nutrients, loss of soil organic carbon and declined productivity. Approximately **60%** (135 million ha) of soil is eroded by wind, which can result in Sand and Dust Storms (SDS) under certain conditions, and causing loses of about **USD 13 billion** in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) every year. Growing population and the increasing demand for red meat has led to significant increases in the numbers of livestock, leading to overgrazing and rapid degradation of rangelands. Primary and natural forests diminished by **13.8%** over the period 1990–2015. Socio-economic and political dynamics can contrubute to land degradation. Land degradation interacts with other processes in ways that undermine the sustainability of household livelihoods and increases the likelihood of migration.

FAO is developing options to avoid further degradation and to support the restoration of already degraded lands. These include sustainable land/soil management (SLM/SSM) policies and practices, including corresponding assessment, planning and management tools. All actions are supported through participatory scaling-up strategies and policies. Experiences and lessons on the role of SLM to combat land degradation are available at local, sub-national, national, regional and global levels. Land use planning is a key tool to support decision-makers at various levels and to guide the allocation of land to optimum uses. FAO implements integrated landscape management and land resource planning approaches for promoting SLM. The Voluntary Guidelines on Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) provide guidelines on how to implement SSM and reverse soil degradation.


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There are many examples of initiatives and projects to promote sustainable management of land resources, with various lessons and recommendations coming from different scales and agro-ecosystems, such as:

- Rangeland management and rehabilitation.
- Terracing and water-harvesting techniques and sustainable integrated land use systems.
- Gum Arabic trees integrated into farms and pasture lands.
- Digital soil mapping, soil laboratory networks and SLM scaling up.
- Participatory land resources planning to support the scaling out and mainstreaming of SLM.
- Conservation practices to increase land productivity.
- Community watershed management to increase productivity and conservation.
- Sand dune stabilization.
- Decision-support land-management and planning at national, sub-national and local levels.

Source: FAO, 2019. Land Degradation and Restoration, Background Paper, Land and Water Days, Cairo, Egypt.

Key messages and recommendations are proposed to provide a comprehensive package to advance the sustainable management of precious resources under harsh environmental and socio-economic conditions in NENA:

- Analysis of the "land degradation – climate change – food security – migration" nexus to tackle the challenges and find sustainable options at different scales.
- Promote the scaling-out of sustainable management options supported by an appropriate enabling environment to combat land degradation, enhance productivity and livelihoods.
- Investing in "land", accompanied with a need to provide knowledge on the costs and benefits of SLM to encourage investments by private and public sectors.
- Enhance the governance of land and water resources and support sustainable management, access and tenure.
- Support transformations from degradation and vulnerability to sustainability and resilience, tools and approaches should be promoted to assess, plan, manage, and monitor natural resources and to inform the decision-making process through a knowledge management and sharing platform.

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