LEARNING REPORT

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Land Degradation Neutrality Knowledge Management and Learning Initiative

Learning from the GEF portfolio of projects

AUTHORS:

Sarah Lebel, Lead Author, Baastel Consulting Group

Ulrich Apel, Asha Bobb-Semple, Ikuko Matsumoto, Jean-Marc Sinnassamy, GEF Secretariat

Graciela Metternicht, Guadalupe Duron, Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)

Foreword by the GEF CEO

Land is a vital resource to humankind, like air and water. Land degradation—the deterioration or loss of the productive capacity of the soils for present and future—is a global challenge that affects everyone through food insecurity, higher food prices, climate change, environmental hazards, and the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has a mandate to invest in global environmental benefits, including restoring and maintaining healthy and productive soils in production landscapes, and it serves as a financial mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

This report identified land degradation neutrality (LDN) as a thematic area and an approach for generating learning and knowledge. The principle of LDN is underpinned by an enabling environment that favors policy coherence, integration across sectors and scales, and iterative learning that ultimately enables the delivery of multiple global environmental benefits and socio-economic co-benefits.

The GEF experience in applying the LDN framework in its portfolio of projects now offers an opportunity for an in-depth analysis of the practices that work best for mainstreaming LDN into national sustainable development agendas. Learning from the portfolio of ongoing projects reflects our commitment to generating knowledge, with full engagement by GEF agencies, our Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, and partner countries.

The report's findings highlight that governance for LDN is multi-dimensional and needs to take into consideration cross-sectoral coordination as a first step for better policy coherence; participatory planning processes; potential trade-offs and competing land uses; land tenure security; and accurate monitoring. The LDN framework provides countries with the opportunity to work—and address enhanced policy coherence—across ministries and agencies on multi-sectoral topics related to biodiversity, climate change mitigation, adaptation, drought, agriculture and livestock, and forests through various means including integrated land use planning.

Fostering inclusivity through LDN is crucial to ensure sustainability and impact. Engagement with stakeholders should be context-specific and based on local and regional conditions. Indigenous Peoples and local communities' and civil societies' role in project design, implementation, monitoring, and conflict mitigation at the local level contribute to sustainability and impacts of the LDN projects. It is also critical to address challenges of gender engagement to achieve inclusivity and equal representation.

The findings and lessons from this analysis have implications for the wider GEF partnership and engagement with countries to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD mandate. The LDN framework has tremendous potential as an entry point for national policy coherence and to scale up sustainable land management globally. It is my hope that this publication will be a source of learning and sharing of experiences among countries and their partners, as they seek to advance the LDN framework for improving land-based natural capital and generate positive global environmental outcomes.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez

CEO and Chairperson
Global Environment Facility

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this learning report is to generate knowledge and share experience with the implementation of land degradation neutrality (LDN) to create a better understanding of practices that work best for mainstreaming LDN into national sustainable development agendas, learning from ongoing applications of the LDN framework in the portfolio of Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects.

The portfolio comprises 67 projects approved between 2016 and 2022 during the GEF-6 and GEF-7 replenishment cycles, implemented in a total of 56 countries covering all regional United Nations Convention to Combat Desertifcation (UNCCD) Annexes. The projects are implemented by nine different GEF agencies and are in various stages of implementation ranging from project preparation to mid-term evaluation stage. The total investment in these projects is $320 million in GEF grants and $2,552 million in co-financing.

The desk review of the entire portfolio shows that LDN pathways are well integrated in project design, with projects harnessing multiple synergies, most notably between LDN and biodiversity objectives. The review also indicates that the use of the LDN guidelines developed by the GEF's Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel is significantly improving the integration of the LDN concept in project designs. Most projects address policy coherence at the national level and half of them include elements for LDN mainstreaming in national policy and regulatory frameworks.

A further in-depth assessment of 10 selected LDN projects revealed various best practices and generated valuable lessons in early implementation stages of these projects.

Among the best practices that are applied in the case studies are integrated land use planning and LDN monitoring frameworks that facilitate cross-sectoral coordination, the use of the LDN framework to enhance policy coherence, stakeholder engagement to integrate LDN into local planning processes, addressing land tenure and gender equality as enabling factors for LDN, engaging with the private sector as a factor for success, and leveraging innovative financing mechanism to support LDN implementation.

The main lessons emerging from the portfolio are the following:

- LDN is a complex scientific concept that needs to be tailored to national and local realities and adjusted to each country's context. Countries employ innovative ways to operationalize the LDN concept, which takes time and resources. This includes the translation of the concept to various ministries at the decision-making level and to lower administrative and technical levels, as well as awareness building to popularize the LDN concept to the broader public.
- Numerous challenges and information gaps still exist in setting, updating, revising, and monitoring voluntary LDN targets. Data accessibility varies between countries: from defining baselines to monitoring progress against targets, with access to geospatial data, which is central to LDN implementation to identify gains and losses, being particularly challenging.

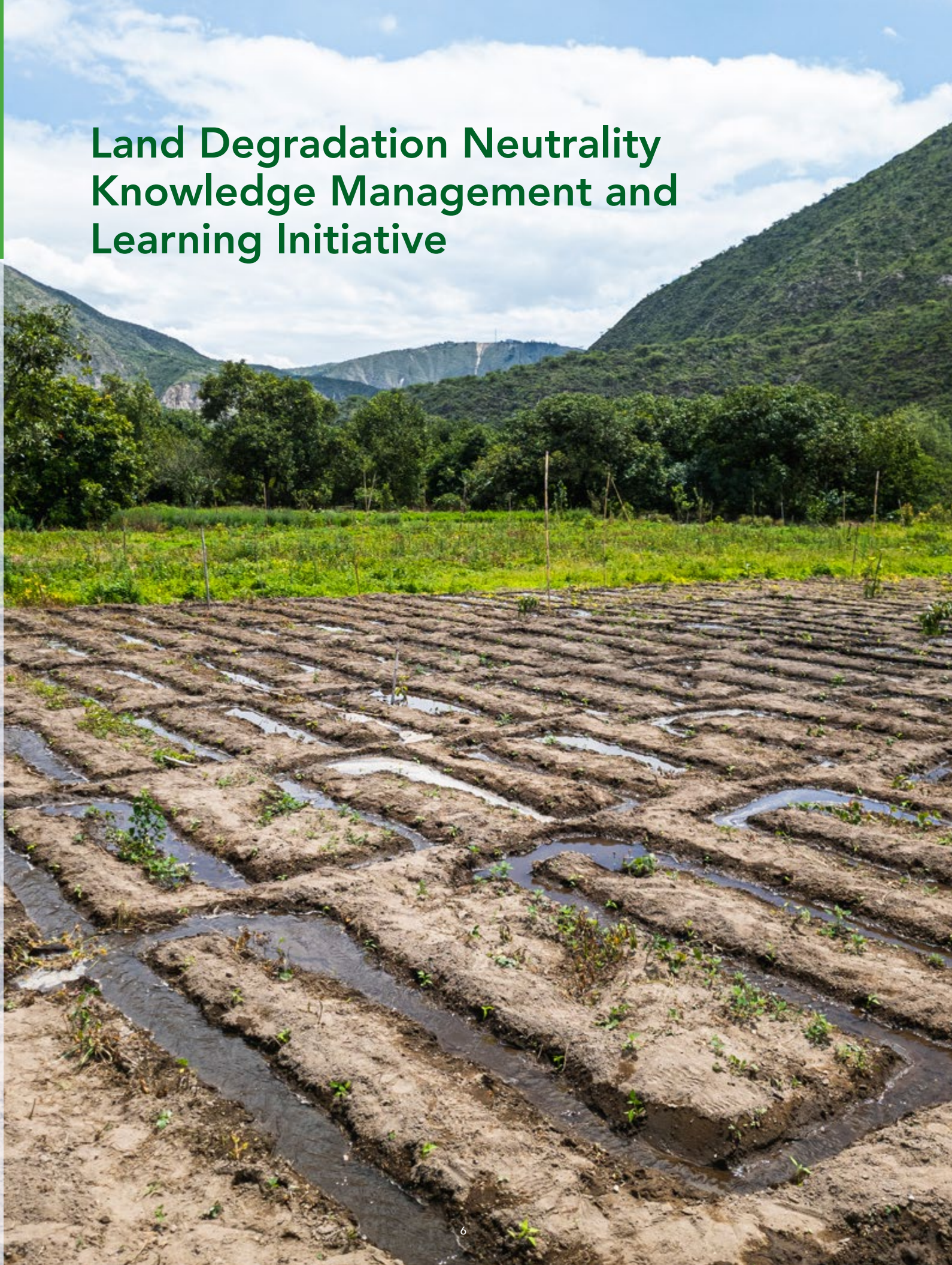
- LDN guidelines for GEF projects have a positive impact on effective integration of the LDN concept in project design. However, they are not all fit-for-purpose in guiding LDN implementation. The report highlights the importance of both theoretical guidelines for shaping project design, and the urgent need for practice-oriented guidelines for subsequent implementation, focusing on an inclusive assessment of LDN action entry points within each country, to prioritize actions to support achieving LDN targets.
- Governance for LDN is multi-dimensional and needs to take into consideration vertical and horizontal (cross-sectoral) coordination as a first step for better policy coherence; participatory planning processes; potential trade-offs and competing land uses; land tenure security; and accurate monitoring.
- The LDN framework provides countries with the opportunity to work—and address enhanced policy coherence—across ministries and agencies on multi-sectoral topics related to biodiversity; climate change mitigation; adaptation; drought; agriculture and livestock; and forests through various means including integrated land use planning.
- Fostering inclusivity through LDN is crucial to ensure sustainability and impact. Engagement with stakeholders should be context-specific and based on local and regional conditions. Indigenous Peoples and local communities' role in project design, implementation, and monitoring and conflict mitigation at the local level contribute to sustainability and impacts of the LDN projects. It is critical to address challenges of gender engagement to achieve inclusivity and equal representation.

The findings and lessons have implications for the wider GEF partnership and engagement with countries to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD mandate. The LDN framework has tremendous potential as an entry point for national policy coherence and to scale up sustainable land management globally; however, it is important to improve the way the concept is communicated to make it more politically appealing for decision makers. Countries that are striving to implement their LDN targets need to set up a structured process adapted to their specific context. They require guidelines that are more practice-oriented and help identify LDN action entry points, such as monitoring, legal framework, capacity building, and gap analysis. Monitoring and reporting of LDN target implementation needs to be facilitated by the GEF partnership and engagement with countries so that global progress towards LDN can be assessed in a timely manner. It is important to recognize that specific national priorities, such as proactive drought management, food security, and water security should be viewed as linked to the LDN concept and not as separate issues.

The collaborative sharing of experiences and joint learning from ongoing projects emerges as essential for mainstreaming the LDN concept into project implementation and, ultimately, national policies. This dynamic and adaptive learning process not only enhances the usefulness and wider application of LDN, but also serves as a valuable feedback mechanism, informing future strategies for achieving LDN and advancing other national priorities such as drought management, adaptation to a changing climate, and food security.

As the GEF's LDN project portfolio matures and expands, both in terms of implementation progress and through addition of new projects, more learning opportunities will arise and be taken up through various means.

Land Degradation Neutrality Knowledge Management and Learning Initiative



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Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
BRS	Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions
CAF	Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSA	Climate-smart Agriculture
CSL	Climate-smart Livestock
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IP	Impact Program
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KM	Knowledge Management
LC	Land Cover
LDFA	Land Degradation Focal Area
LDN	Land Degradation Neutrality
LPD	Land Productivity Dynamics
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MFA	Multifocal Area

MTR	Mid-term Evaluation Report
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NAPA	National Adaptation Programme of Action
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NPP	Net Primary Productivity
PFD	Program Framework Document
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PPG	Project Preparation Grant
PS	Private Sector
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOC	Soil Organic Carbon
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the GEF
ToC	Theory of Change
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Land degradation neutrality (LDN) is defined by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as the "state whereby the amount and quality of land resources, necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security, remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems." This concept emerged from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 and aims at a world where human activity has a neutral, or even positive impact on the land. It responds to human-induced actions which exploit land, causing its utility, biodiversity, soil fertility, and overall health to decline, and addresses an immediate challenge: intensifying the production of food, fuel, and fiber to meet future demand without further degrading our finite land resource base.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) became a financial mechanism of the UNCCD in 2006, and through the land degradation focal area (LDFA), it has provided incremental financing for countries to invest in sustainable land management (SLM) activities that generate multiple global environmental benefits and local socio-economic benefits. Following the UNCCD COP12 held in Ankara, Türkiye, in 2015, the GEF began incorporating LDN into the implementation of its projects and programs.[1]

In the sixth replenishment period (GEF-6), the LDFA included support of the LDN Target Setting Process,[2] including setting national baselines, targets, and associated measures to achieve LDN. In GEF-7, the LDFA strategy was fully aligned with LDN, supporting it as an approach and an objective. In GEF-7, 22 LDFA projects focused on LDN, while an additional 93 multifocal area (MFA) projects supported LDN. Therefore, the LDN projects constitute a major part of the LDFA portfolio of projects under implementation and represent a significant opportunity for learning.

1.2. Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this knowledge management and learning initiative is to generate knowledge for adaptative management, and subsequently achieve better results, promote the improved design of future projects, and help achieve durable impact by enhancing understanding of practices that work best for mainstreaming LDN into national sustainable development agendas.

The overall objective is to learn from ongoing applications of the LDN framework in GEF projects. The LDN framework has potential to serve as an integrative framework for improving land-based natural capital and generating global environmental outcomes, and for achieving the goals and objectives of the GEF-8 Programming Directions. This initiative enabled direct engagement and consultation with key stakeholders on overall challenges and enablers of application of LDN to implement the UNCCD agenda, with a specific focus on understanding the issues and future support needs of countries applying the LDN approach in GEF-financed projects as part of their national sustainable development agendas.

1 GEF. "Land Degradation Neutrality." Accessed on May 1, 2024.

2 In response to the decisions taken by the UNCCD COP12, the global mechanism of the UNCCD established a LDN Target Setting Programme, which aims to support countries to define national LDN targets and associated measures.

The learning questions for this exercise were as follows:

- Q1: How do countries apply the LDN concept in GEF projects, and do they use the existing LDN guidelines and checklists?
- Q2: Are GEF projects designed to support mainstreaming of the LDN concept into national policy and regulatory frameworks?
- Q3: How are projects planning to monitor LDN interventions?
- Q4: Is the LDN framework used to promote policy coherence?
- Q5: How do LDN projects address gender equality and women empowerment, private sector engagement, and drought?

1.3. Structure of the Report

The report is organized into six chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the GEF LDN portfolio at the project identification form (PIF) stage, along the lines of the analytical framework developed for this learning exercise.

Chapter 3 then delves deeper into some areas of interest identified in Chapter 2 and presents the results of the second phase of the learning exercise by focusing on a representative sample of 10 projects under implementation. That analysis is based on an in-depth review of project documents, as well as interviews with key stakeholders involved in project implementation.

Chapter 4 presents key lessons identified throughout this learning exercise, synthesizing findings from both the portfolio review and the in-depth analysis of ten representative projects.

Chapter 5 presents opportunities to further the LDN impacts across GEF projects and proposes ways to advance LDN interventions. It focuses on the implications of the lessons presented in Chapter 4 and proposes entry points for future work for the GEF Secretariat and its engagement with the UNCCD, countries, and GEF agencies.

Finally, Chapter 6 presents brief conclusions to this report.

2. Overview of the GEF LDN Portfolio

2.1. The GEF's LDN Portfolio

The portfolio comprises 50 projects and two programs approved in the GEF-6 and GEF-7 replenishment cycles, implemented in a total of 56 countries covering all regional UNCCD annexes. The projects and programs are implemented by nine different GEF agencies. Please see Annex 1 for a portfolio list including further details.

All these projects and programs are aligned with the LDFA programming objectives on LDN and have tagged the respective keyword in the GEF taxonomy at PIF submission. They are targeting to various extents the implementation of the voluntary LDN targets set by countries.

The two programs include the Sustainable Drylands Management Program with 11 national child projects related to LDN and the Food Systems, Restoration and Land Use Program with six national child projects.

The total investment into the 67 stand-alone and child projects is $320 million in GEF grants and $2,552 million in co-financing.

The projects are in various implementation stages ranging from the project preparation grant (PPG) phase after approval to mid-term review during implantation (most advanced).

2.2. Methodological Approach

In this first phase of the learning exercise, a rapid desk-based assessment of the LDN project portfolio was undertaken, looking at PIFs and program framework documents (PFDs). The analysis provides a qualitative assessment of the extent to which the different dimensions of the LDN concept are integrated in projects designs. The following two steps comprised the analysis:

a. A rapid qualitative assessment of PIFs and PFDs for the entire portfolio of 50 LDN projects and two programs (see Annex 1 for full list of projects and programs considered) for the level of integration of the LDN concept in project design, using a word frequency search.

b. A rapid review of Table B of the PIFs (i.e., the project logical frameworks) to provide further insights on a number of learning questions, and keyword searches where relevant.

Expert judgement was used to validate the findings from steps a. and b. and adjust ratings when necessary.

Step a. Assessing how the LDN concept is integrated into the design of PIFs and PFDs

In a first step, the analysis focused on answering the question:

- How do countries apply the LDN concept in GEF projects? By looking at three dimensions of LDN:
    c. Proposed Pathways (i.e., What is the evidence of projects adopting an LDN pathway to achieve transformational change?);
    d. Synergies (i.e., What is the evidence of projects actively looking at providing multiple environmental and socio-economic benefits through integrated approaches, with a focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups?); and
    e. Trade-offs (i.e., What is the evidence of projects looking at both gains and losses towards achieving a balanced system?).

Other learning questions that were partly covered through this first step of the analysis include:

- Is the LDN framework used to promote policy coherence at national levels?
- Is the LDN framework used to promote linkages with other convention agenda for multiple benefits?

To answer these questions, sets of keywords were identified which could indicate different dimensions taken into consideration in project designs (see Table 2). Keywords that appear in the PIF template were excluded from the count, as were those that appeared in the taxonomy and in references. In addition, for the terms which had acronyms, both the acronym and the entire term were counted (e.g., Land Degradation Neutrality and LDN), except for the times when they appeared successively (e.g., Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)) where only one occurrence was counted. Moreover, certain terms were grouped together where they were found to be used interchangeably.

Finally, each LDN dimension was then rated from 1 to 4 with respect to the level of LDN concept integration in the PIF or PFD, with 4 being the highest rating. Then, a composite score was developed, with each dimension being given the same weight.

Table 1: Rating Scale for LDN Concept Integration in PIFs and PFDs

RATING SCALE			
RATING CATEGORY		SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
Extensive integration of the LDN concept	Evidence is clear of LDN concept integration	4	Very clear evidence is available in the PIF or PFD of LDN concept integration. 80% or more of keywords are in the PIF or PFD.
Significant integration	Evidence is present of the significant integration of the LDN concept	3	There is evidence of the significant integration of the LDN concept in the PIF or PFD; 65% or more of the keywords are present.
Some integration	Evidence of some integration of the LDN concept	2	Some evidence is available in the PIF or PFD of the LDN concept integration in project design; 50% or more keywords are present.
Limited integration	No information or limited evidence of LDN concept integration	1	Very limited or no evidence of LDN concept integration; less than 50% of keywords are present.

Table 2: Keywords Searches in the Portfolio Review

Proposed Pathways
Avoid*
Reduc*
Revers*
Restor*
Rehabilitat*
SLM/sustainable land management
Participatory
Inclusiv
Multi-stakeholder/multistakeholder
Landscape
Voluntary/enabling environment
Land tenure
Gender-responsive/ gender responsive
Land cover change/LCC
Land productivity dynamics/Net primary productivity/NPP/Land productivity trend
Carbon stocks/Soil organic carbon/SOC
Theory of change/ToC
Impact pathway
Food system
Livelihood
Value chain
Governance
Land rights
Synergies
Co-benefit*/multiple benefits/socio-economic benefits
Land use plan/integrated land management/integrated landscape management/land use management/integration of land
Cross-sector*/multi-sector
Local/indigenous/traditional knowledge
Local/indigenous/traditional practice
Multi-level
Multi-scale/Cross-scale

* indicates that only the root word has been used in the word search.

MEA(s)/multilateral environmental agreement/UNFCCC/CBD/Minamata/BRS/NAPA/NAP/Aichi/ NBSAP/NDC
SDG(s)/sustainable development goal
15.3
Linkage*
Drought*
Flood*
Job/employment
Income
Climate change mitigation
Ecosystem services
Biodiversity
Climate change adaptation
Alternative livelihood
Food security
Natural capital
Trade-offs
Gain*
Loss*
Counterbalanc*
Neutrality/ LDN
Priorit*
Decision-support system/decision-support mechanism/decision-support tool
Spillover
Leakage
Indirect effect
Incentiv*/disincentiv*
Conflict

* indicates that only the root word has been used in the word search.

Step b. Review of the PIFs' logical frameworks

In this second step of the portfolio review, the following was completed:

- The mention of the LDN guidelines and/or checklist in PIFs and PFDs was used as a proxy to assess Q1b: How useful are the existing LDN guidelines and checklists?
- To help answer Q2: Are the GEF projects designed to support mainstreaming of the LDN concept into national policy and regulatory frameworks? Each PIF's logical framework was reviewed to see if there was a project Component/Outcome/or Output dedicated to mainstreaming of the LDN concept into national policy and regulatory frameworks.
- To help answer Q3: How are projects planning to monitor LDN interventions? Each PIF's logical framework was reviewed to see if there was a project Component/ Outcome/or Output dedicated to monitoring LDN (beyond the project M&E framework).
- To help answer Q4a: Is the LDN framework used to promote policy coherence at national levels? Each PIF's logical framework was reviewed to see if there was a project Component/Outcome/or Output dedicated to policy coherence at national level. It included interventions such as multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms, or interventions to improve policy alignment across sectors.
- To help answer Q4b: Is the LDN framework used to promote linkages with other convention agenda for multiple benefits? Each project was reviewed to see if the project was a MFA, and if so with additional funding associated with which MEA.
- Finally, to help answer Q5a: How do LDN projects address gender? In all PIFs and 2 PFDs from GEF-7, the GEF gender tags that were selected were identified (i.e. (i) Closing gender gaps in access to and control over resources; (ii) Improving women's participation and decision making; and/or (iii) Contributing to social and economic benefits or services for women). The mention of the term "gender-responsive" in PIFs was also used to assess this question.

2.3. Results of the Portfolio Desk Review

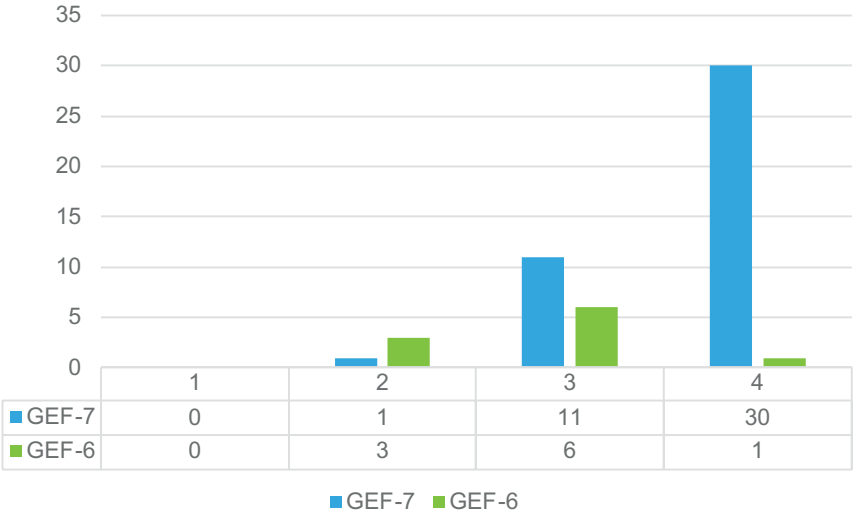
1) LDN pathways are well integrated in project design

Overall, projects integrate LDN pathways well into their project design, with an average rating of 3.52 out of 4. The analysis clearly shows that projects designed under GEF-7 integrate the LDN pathways better into the project design than projects from GEF-6. Indeed, the average score of projects under GEF-6 for LDN pathways is 2.80, with only 1 project (ID 9293) out of 10 scoring a 4. On the other hand, projects under GEF-7 have an average score of 3.69, with 30 out of 42 projects scoring 4. The terms avoid, reduce, reverse, and restore are mentioned in almost all the projects, with only four projects not mentioning the term reverse (ID 10732, ID 10692, ID 9586, and ID 9239). These terms appear often in the outcomes or outputs of the logical framework, and avoid, reduce, and reverse are often used together in the same sentence.

The terms sustainable land management, landscape, and livelihood are also mentioned in all projects, except for one project (ID 9667) which does not mention livelihood. In addition

to being mentioned in all projects, these terms are present in almost all logical frameworks, whether in the title, in one of the components, in the outcomes, or outputs. They are therefore cited many times in each PIF/PFD, with sustainable land management and landscape being cited more than 50 times each in more than 24 projects.

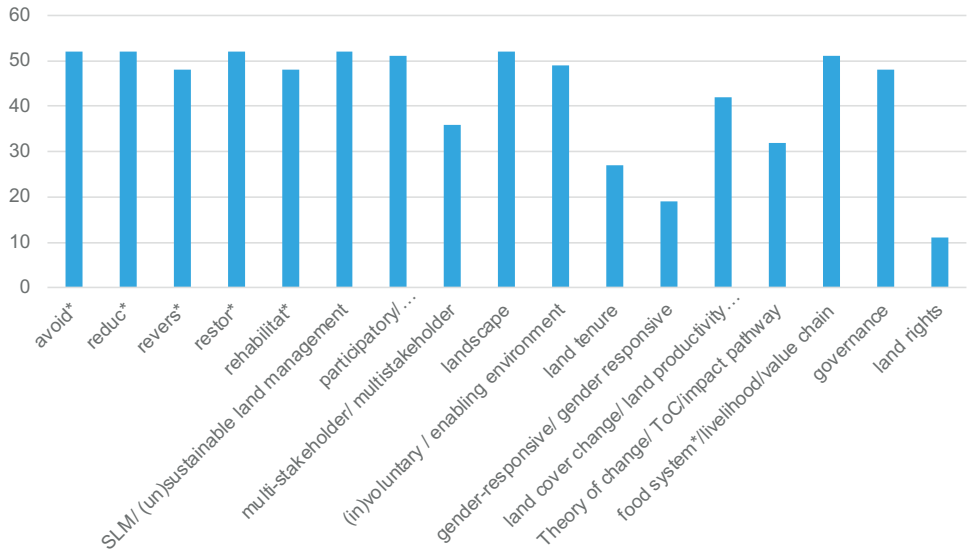
Figure 1: LDN Pathways Scores Frequency



While the term "Theory of Change" was not well integrated into the earlier GEF-6 PIFs, the most recent project designs almost all include it. However, the term impact pathways was only used in one project (ID 10863).

The terms land tenure and land rights were the least cited terms reviewed, with land tenure being mentioned in about half of the PIFs/PFDs (52%), and land rights being mentioned in only 11 projects (21%).

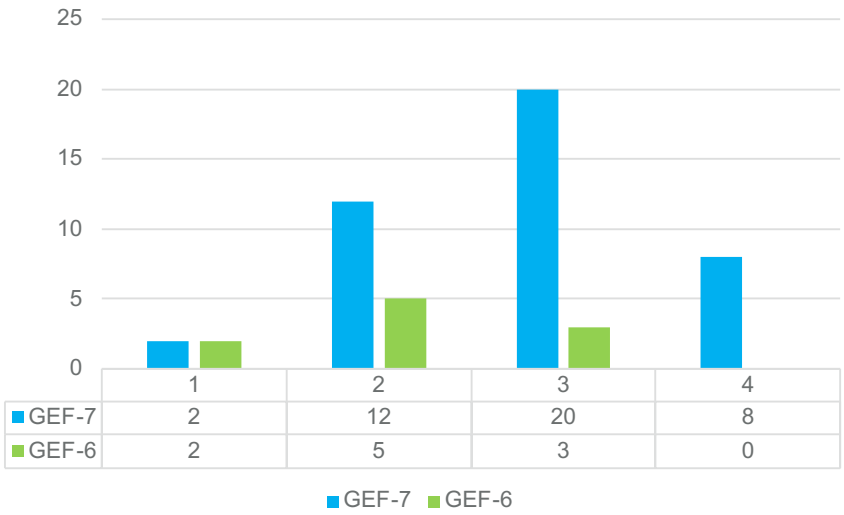
Figure 2: Number of Projects Using LDN Pathways-related Keywords



2) *LDN projects harness multiple synergies*

Regarding addressing synergies, the PIFs/PFDs present greater variability in terms of level of integration. The average for all projects is 2.7 out of 4. As for the previous point on LDN pathways, the evolution is positive over time, with the most recent projects having a better score than the earlier ones (average score of 2.8 for projects under GEF-7, and of 2.1 for those under GEF-6). The terms land use plan/management and its derivatives;[3] ecosystem services; and biodiversity were found multiple times in all the project designs, and are regularly found in the outcomes, outputs, or results indicators (except for project ID 10191).

Figure 3: Synergies Scores Frequency



On the other hand, the terms "alternative livelihood" and "natural capital" were only found in 23% and 35% of project designs, respectively.

The terms cross-sector or multi-sector were mentioned in most projects (81%). However, the terms multi-level, multi-scale, or cross-scale were present in few projects (i.e., multi-level was mentioned in 10 projects and multi-scale/cross-scale was mentioned in seven projects). This finding could potentially be important for LDN project design, as LDN requires clear reference to spatial (and temporal) scales. Spatial scales for LDN do not always equate with jurisdictional boundaries, and LDN requires the monitoring of indicators at multiple scales.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were mentioned in the majority of projects (85%). Only 4 out of 10 earlier projects under GEF-6 mentioned them, whereas almost all recent projects under GEF-7 did (95%). The pursuit of SDG 15.3 in particular was mentioned in the majority of projects (62%), with designs either mentioning that the project will specifically contribute to the achievement of SDG 15.3 or mentioning SDG 15.3 in the section on associated baseline projects and national strategies.

Drought and flood issues were mentioned in at least 90% of projects.

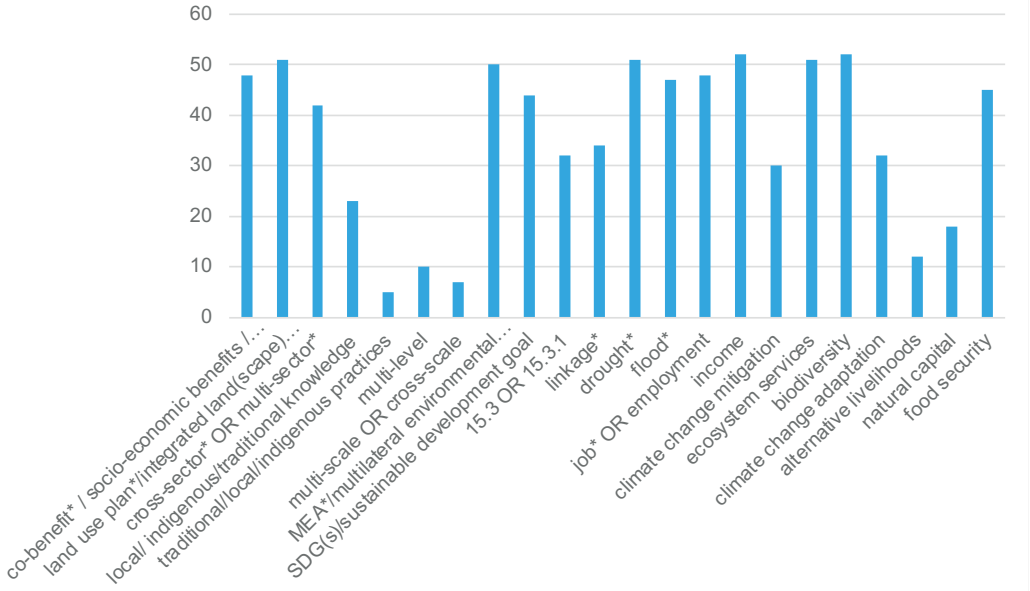
Traditional knowledge and its derivatives[4] were cited in almost half of the projects and were more mentioned than traditional practices and its derivatives, which were mentioned in only

3 Its derivatives include integrated land management, integrated landscape management, land use management and integration of land.

4 It includes also local knowledge and Indigenous knowledge.

five projects. However, the keyword search may not have been able to fully capture these aspects, as they can be highlighted by many other keywords such as Indigenous Peoples, local communities, or traditional cultures, for example.

Figure 4: Number of Projects Using Synergies-related Keywords



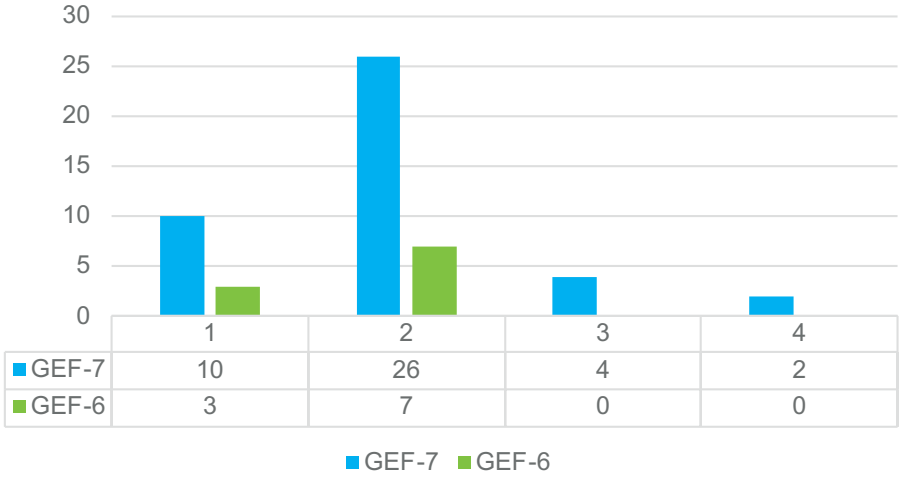
Finally, a clear difference was also noted between projects under GEF-6 and projects under GEF-7 concerning the term "co-benefits" and its derivatives,[5] which was used in 6 out of 10 projects under GEF-6 and is used in all projects implemented under GEF-7. The most frequently cited co-benefits were climate change mitigation and adaptation, and biodiversity conservation. Other co-benefits cited include human health, water conservation or gender equality and women's empowerment. However, it can be noted that for about half of the projects, the term co-benefit is only used in the indicator "Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment."

3) LDN projects design insufficiently address potential trade-offs

While LDN pathways concepts were well integrated and LDN projects have the potential to exploit multiple synergies, they appear to fail to explicitly mention potential trade-offs at PIF/ PFD stage.

5 It includes socio-economic benefits and multiple benefits.

Figure 5: Trade-offs Scores Frequency

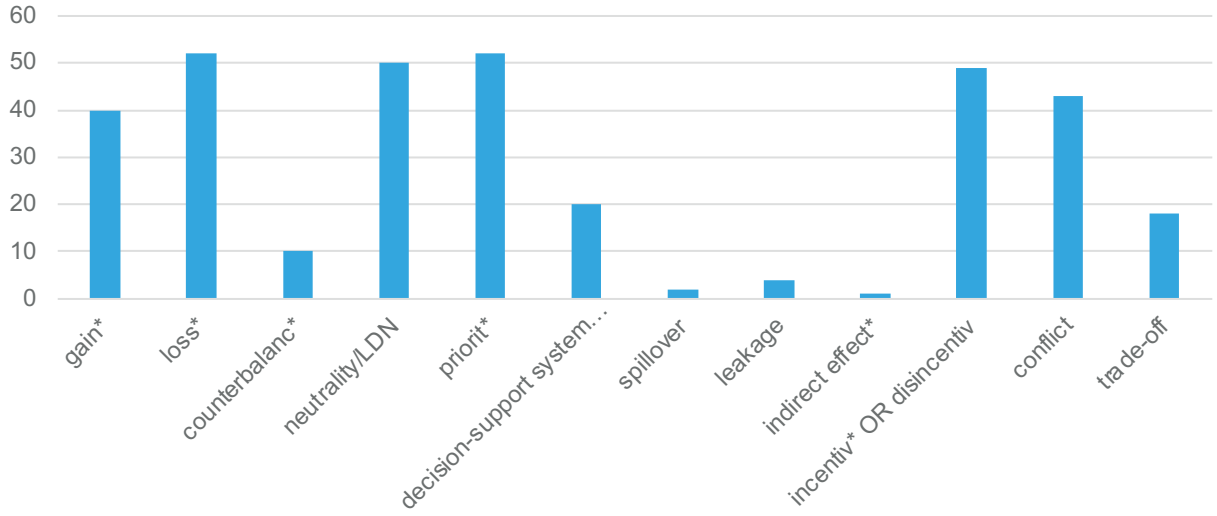


Overall, ratings for the trade-offs dimension of the LDN concept were the lowest across the portfolio, and only two projects scored a 4.0 (ID 10608 and ID 10206 - the Dryland Sustainable Landscapes Program).

While all projects mentioned the term 'loss*,' and the vast majority used the term "gain*" (77%), only 25 of 52 projects use either the term "counterbalanc*" or "trade-off." These projects have an average cumulative score of 3.0 out of 4.0 for LDN concept integration, well above the portfolio average (2.7), despite not necessarily scoring very high in the trade-offs dimension. This may suggest that these keywords are more representative of the LDN concept than the combination of terms used in the analysis.

The terms spillover or leakage are not commonly used, with some exceptions (two projects include the term spillover and four include leakage). On the other hand, almost all projects are mentioning the term incentiv* or disincentiv*, most of the time for setting up economic mechanisms for sustainable management actions.

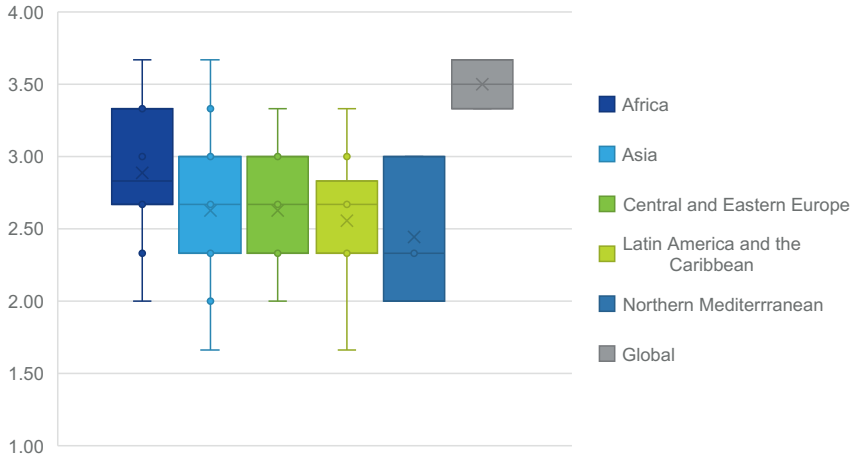
Figure 6: Number of Projects Using Trade-offs Related Keywords



4) *Comparison by UNCCD region and GEF agencies show mixed results*

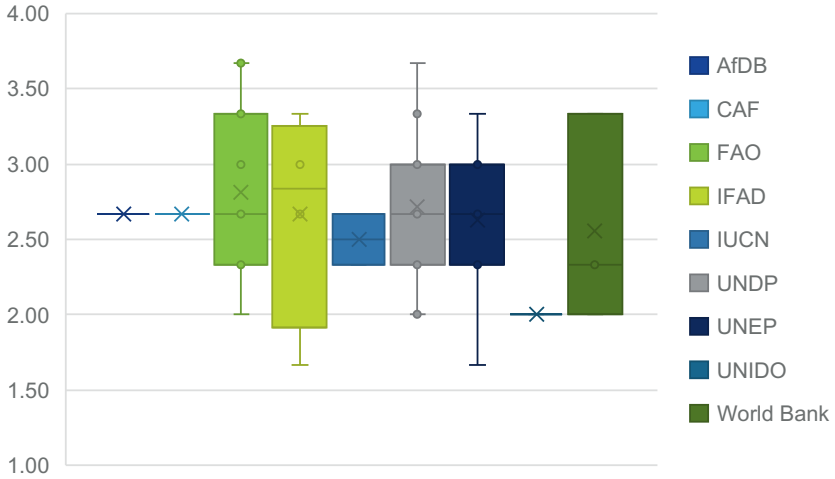
A comparison of total scores by UNCCD region shows that the two Global projects have higher scores (average of 3.50) than the average (2.7), as do the 12 projects implemented in Africa (average of 2.89) (see Figure 7 below). Projects implemented in Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, or Latin America and the Caribbean have a slightly lower average, around 2.6. Finally, the three projects implemented in the Mediterranean have variable scores, with an average score of 2.44.

Figure 7: Total Scores by UNCCD Region



Looking at the scores by GEF agency (see Figure 8), the results show that FAO has an average score slightly higher than average (2.81), and it is also the agency with the highest number of LDN projects (35% of the projects in the portfolio). UNDP is the second agency with the most LDN projects, and its projects have an average score of 2.72. A clear improvement in the score over time can be seen for UNDP, with none of the first eight projects exceeding a score of 3, while the five most recent projects are all exceeding the score of 3. Nine projects are implemented by UNEP, with highly variable scores. AfDB, CAF, and IUCN each have only one or two projects, with scores in the average range, while UNIDO also has only one project with a score of 2.

Figure 8: Total Scores by GEF Agency



5) Use of STAP LDN guidelines are significantly improving the integration of the LDN concept in project designs

The LDN checklist was made available on the GEF website as early as September 2018, and all GEF-7 LDN projects applied the Checklist for Land Degradation Neutrality Transformative Projects and Programs.[6] However, only four projects mention the LDN checklist in their PIF (ID 11003; ID 10854; ID 10356; and ID 10352), with an average composite score for LDN concept integration only sightly above average at 2.83, compared to 2.70 overall. Project ID 11003 uses scores of the LDN checklist as part of its results indicators, while ID 10356 uses the term in the phrasing of an Outcome. Project ID 10352 highlights how the design adheres to the checklist.

On the other hand, in November 2019 STAP published a 16-page set of guidelines for LDN,[7] followed by a technical report for those guidelines in April 2020.[8] Project ID 10346 was found to have the first mention[9] of STAP's guidelines in the annexed comments from STAP in December 2019, where the project developers acknowledge having consulted the guidelines and integrated the recommendations in the design. Of the 36 projects approved since December 2019, eight (22%) mention the term LDN guidelines, with this proportion increasing over time to 40% for the 15 projects approved in 2021 and June 2022.

All but two of the eight projects (ID 10732[10] and ID 10346[11]) have a composite score well above average with regards to the LDN concept integration, and these are the only two projects that did not refer to STAP LDN guidelines throughout project design. The average for the six remaining projects which refer to STAP LDN guidelines specifically is 3.33/4.0 (the average for all projects reviewed is 2.70, or 2.80 for the 36 approved since December 2019). These projects were designed by FAO (3) and UNDP (3), in a wide range of geographies. This strongly suggests that the use of STAP LDN guidelines may have contributed to better LDN concept integration in project designs.

6) Half of projects have dedicated Components/Outcomes/Outputs for LDN mainstreaming in national policy and regulatory frameworks

A total of 26 out of 52 projects (50%) were found to integrate LDN mainstreaming in national policy and regulatory frameworks at Component, Outcome, and/or Output level. These projects had a composite LDN concept integration score slightly above the overall average, at 2.81 (2.70 average). In general, projects addressed this aspect either through an entire Outcome dedicated to LDN mainstreaming in national policies and planning, or through an Output on the review of strategic regulatory frameworks to enhance mainstreaming of LDN, or on the development of integrated land use plans. Eight other projects have a dedicated Component, Outcome, or Output for mainstreaming LDN in policies but at a municipal, provincial, or district level, not a national level.

6 GEF. Sept. 17, 2018. "Checklist for Land Degradation Neutrality Transformative Projects and Programmes."

7 Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the GEF. Nov. 2019. "Land Degradation Neutrality: guidelines for GEF projects."

8 Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the GEF. April 2020. "Guidelines for Land Degradation Neutrality."

9 The word search also found that the first occurrence of the term LDN guidelines occurred in project ID 9586, where it was proposed to develop LDN guidelines based on project experience (PIF approved in May 2017).

10 This PIF referred to developing a national LDN guideline as part of the project.

11 This PIF only referred to STAP LDN guidelines in response to comments, hence post-design.

A total of 26 out of 52 projects (50%) integrated LDN monitoring at Component, Outcome, and/or Output level. These projects had a composite LDN concept integration score slightly above the overall average, at 2.88 (2.70 average). About 10 other projects had a Component/Outcome/Output that was related to LDN monitoring. For example, some of these projects had outputs concerning the monitoring of sustainable land management (SLM) activities, the monitoring of land use, or the establishment of an SLM and LDN knowledge management hub. However, these projects did not explicitly state that they planned to track changes in the three global indicators relative to the baseline value for each land unit: land cover, assessed as LCC; land productivity, assessed as NPP; and carbon stocks, assessed as SOC.

7) The majority of projects have dedicated Components/Outcomes/Outputs for policy coherence

A total of 38 out of 52 projects (approx. 73%) integrate some elements of policy coherence at Component, Outcome, and/or Output level. These projects also have a composite LDN concept integration score above the overall average, at 2.86 (2.70 average). Here again, a clear difference could be observed between projects implemented under GEF-6 for which only half of the 10 projects integrate this aspect, and projects implemented under GEF-7 for which only a few projects do not integrate this aspect. Interventions targeting policy coherence include, for example, an Outcome or Output on the implementation of a multi-stakeholder coordination platform, on the establishment of multi-stakeholder policy dialogue on SLM, or an Output to improve policy coherence/alignment of LDN with national development government planning.

8) More than a third of projects are MFAs, with the majority addressing LDN and biodiversity

A total of 20 out of 52 projects (approx. 38%) are MFAs and therefore receive funds from other GEF focal areas. These projects do not have a composite LDN concept integration score significantly different from the overall average, at 2.72 (2.70 average).

Those MFAs are almost all aligned with the biodiversity focal area, with the exception of one: project ID 9293, which is unique as it focuses on sustainable forest management, climate change mitigation, as well as chemicals and waste.

However, it is important to note that despite not receiving funding from various focal areas, most of the projects deal with a variety of environmental and development concerns. In fact, every project includes a reference to biodiversity, 30 mention climate change mitigation, while 32 mention climate change adaptation. Therefore, there may be significantly more opportunities for LDN projects to be designed as MFAs, given the potential benefits for biodiversity and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

All but two of the projects mention one or more conventions in addition to UNCCD, including UNFCCC, CBD, BRS, or Minamata. The UNFCCC and CBD are the conventions often cited, while BRS or Minamata are less often found in project design. These conventions are in most cases mentioned in the paragraph on consistency with national priorities and/or in the paragraph on global environment benefits and adaptation benefits.

9) The majority of GEF-7 projects address all three GEF gender objectives

A new GEF Policy on Gender Equality was approved at the 53rd meeting of the GEF Council in 2017. Subsequent guidance published in June 2018 identified the requirements to be met at PIF/PFD stage.[12] In GEF-7, all PIFs adopted a template which required them to identify the results areas relevant to the project, through three gender tags.

The analysis finds that the objective of "Closing gender gaps in access to and control over resources" is the least commonly checked, with 9 projects not selecting it out of 41 (22%). The GEF recognizes that not all projects can make significant contributions to gender objectives, and projects are not penalized with respect to this. However, there may be some missed opportunities for LDN-focused projects to address "closing gender gaps in access to and control over resources," as there should be multiple entry points for those projects in this results area.

Finally, 19 projects used the term "gender-responsive", with all but one (ID 9239) being GEF-7 projects. This term was used mainly in the perspective of a gender-responsive stakeholder engagement within the project team or during the trainings planned and was not necessarily "action-oriented."

12 GEF. Dec. 2018. "GEF Guidance on Gender Equality."

3. LDN in Practice: Findings from In-depth Review of 10 Projects

The second phase of this learning exercise provided an opportunity to delve deeper into a subset of the LDN portfolio to help answer further the learning questions. The process entailed a desk-based component where project documents, project implementation reports (PIRs), and mid-term evaluation reports (MTRs), if available, were reviewed in detail, with this information complemented by key informant interviews and focus groups.

3.1. Approach to the In-depth Review of Projects

3.1.1. Sampling Approach

A sample of 10 projects was selected for the in-depth project reviews, with the sampling informed by the first phase of the analysis. In particular, as this exercise sought to elicit lessons learned, projects which were rated as having significant or some evidence of LDN concept integration at PIF stage using the above analytical framework were being prioritized. Below are the additional sampling criteria used:

i. Projects CEO endorsed for at least one year/under implementation only.

ii. Inclusion of a representative number of child projects of the two Impact Programs (two Drylands projects and one Food Systems project).

iii. Representative geographic distribution:[13] Asia (4); Africa (2); Latin America and the Caribbean (2); Central and Eastern Europe (1); Northern Mediterranean (1).

iv. Multi-focal area projects and land degradation only projects (four land degradation only projects and three multifocal area projects + three child projects which are also MFAs).

v. Projects from a diverse set of GEF agencies: FAO (4); UNDP (2); World Bank (2); UNEP (2).

The implementation of the LDN concept in each of the projects was further investigated, using a detailed analytical matrix informed by the results of the portfolio review. This review matrix is presented in Annex 4 and includes learning questions and the associated data collection tools used throughout this process.

13 The regional groupings from the UNCCD were used for determining geographical distribution: Five world regions – Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe.

Table 3: Projects Selected for In-depth Review

GEF ID	Project name	IP/GEF Period	Country	Region	Focal Area	Agency	Status
10299	Kazakhstan Resilient Agroforestry and Rangeland Management Project	Dryland, GEF-7	Kazakhstan	Asia	MFA	WB/ FAO	Under Implementation, PIR 2022
10249	Promoting Dryland Sustainable Landscapes and Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia	Dryland, GEF-7	Mongolia	Asia	MFA	FAO	Under Implementation
10594	Burundi Landscape Restoration and Resilience Project	Food System, GEF-7	Burundi	Africa	MFA	WB	Under Implementation
10588	Sustainable land management and restoration of productive landscapes in river basins for the implementation of national targets of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in Panama	GEF-7	Panama	LAC	LD	FAO	Under Implementation
10356	Conservation and sustainable management of lakes, wetlands, and riparian corridors as pillars of a resilient and land degradation neutral Aral basin landscape supporting sustainable livelihoods	GEF-7	Uzbekistan	Asia	MFA	UNDP	Under Implementation
10184	LDN Target-Setting and Restoration of Degraded Landscapes in Western Andes and Coastal areas	GEF-7	Ecuador	LAC	LD	FAO	Under Implementation
10161	Ecosystem Restoration and Sustainable Land Management to improve livelihoods and protect biodiversity in Nauru	GEF-7	Nauru	Asia	MFA	UNEP	CEO Endorsement Clear
9759	Promoting Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Through Strengthening Legal and Institutional Framework, Capacity Building and Restoration of Most Vulnerable Mountain Landscapes	GEF-6	North Macedonia	CEE	LD	UNEP	Under Implementation
9586	Contributing to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Target Setting by Demonstrating the LDN Approach in the Upper Sakarya Basin for Scaling up at National Level	GEF-6	Türkiye	CEE	LD	FAO	Under Implementation
9426	Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty (NILALEG)	GEF-6	Namibia	Africa	MFA	UNDP	Under Implementation

3.2. Good Practice from LDN Projects

In the following sections, good practices from the different projects reviewed in depth are presented, broadly following the structure key learning questions outlined at the beginning of this report.

3.2.1.Strengthening Cross-sectoral Coordination for LDN

Projects reviewed show that countries are using the LDN framework as an entry point for enhancing cross-sectoral coordination and planning for addressing environmental issues, adapted to the specific country context. It is interesting to note that responsibility for LDN lies in a wide range of government ministries. For instance, UNCCD Focal Points of the 10 projects reviewed are often located in ministries of environment or agriculture: but also in ministries of international relations. This characteristic is often a defining factor for how cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms are set up; where UNCCD Focal Points also serve other conventions for instance, they may be better positioned to encourage leveraging existing structures to support LDN.

Here, different examples of support for cross-sectoral coordination in support of LDN provided through GEF projects are presented. Examples present various entry points for developing governance arrangements around LDN, such as integrated land use planning (ILUP); integrated water resources management (IWRM); but also setting up LDN monitoring frameworks, including jointly with monitoring and reporting frameworks of other MEAs.

Box 1: Integrated Land Use Planning (ILUP) and Integrated Landscape Management (ILM)[14]

Integrated land use planning refers to assessing and allocating land-based resources across a landscape, accounting for differing uses and demands from different users (Metternicht, 2017). It requires the coordination of planning and management across sectors concerned with land resources and their use within a spatial administrative or geographic unit (e.g., catchment, region, and/or country). The purpose of ILUP is to identify the combination of land uses that can meet stakeholders' needs while safeguarding resources for the future. By examining all land uses in an integrated manner, ILUP identifies the most efficient trade-offs between land use options and links social and economic development with environmental protection and enhancement, thus helping to achieve sustainable land management (FAO, 2018). ILUP is an umbrella term that includes more specific approaches such as—but not limited to—territorial planning and spatial planning.

ILUP to achieve LDN is land use planning that seeks to balance the economic, social, and cultural opportunities that land provides to various sectors and jurisdictions with the need to maintain and enhance ecosystem services provided by land-based natural capital.

Integrated landscape management refers to long-term collaboration among different groups of stakeholders to achieve the multiple objectives required from the landscape. Five key features—all of which facilitate participatory development processes—characterize ILM: (i) shared or agreed-upon management objectives that encompass multiple landscape benefits; (ii) field practices that are designed to contribute to multiple objectives; (iii) management of ecological, social, and economic interactions for the realization of positive synergies and the mitigation of negative trade-offs; (iv) collaborative, community-engaged planning, management, and monitoring processes; and (v) the re-configuration of markets and public policies to achieve diverse landscape objectives. ILM is concerned with the development of management strategies for landscapes rather than with how they are spatially parceled or zoned.

14 Taken from: P.H. Verburg, G. Metternicht, E. Aynekulu, X. Deng, S. Herrmann, K. Schulze, F. Akinyemi, N. Barger, V. Boerger, F. Dosdogru, H. Gichenje, M. Kapović-Solomun, Z. Karim, R. Lal, A. Luise, B.S. Masuku, E. Nairesiae, N. Oettlé, A. Pilon, O. Raja, N.H. Ravindranath, R. Ristić and G. von Maltitz. 2022. The Contribution of Integrated Land Use Planning and Integrated Landscape Management to Implementing Land Degradation Neutrality: Entry Points and Support Tools. A Report of the Science-Policy Interface. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Bonn, Germany.

Both ILUP and ILM have integral roles to play in achieving LDN. Traditionally, land use planning mainly involves the technical process of allocating land use rights according to land suitability. By comparison, ILUP allows a consideration of the diverse interests in the land that are increasingly recognized as key to environmental targets and to socio-economic and cultural values. The approach strives to integrate environmental, socio-cultural, and economic data from a variety of stakeholders and users to allocate land in an optimum fashion according to its suitability. At the same time, it attends to divergent stakeholder preferences and legal standings, operating on the level of policy, regulation, zoning, and so on. Public participation, scale, and the spatial-temporal aspects are important to ILUP and ILM.

- **Mongolia:** The project aimed to enhance landscape planning through 13 national and local working groups, formed under the National Land Reform Committee. Comprising diverse stakeholders like ministries (Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Environment and Tourism; Land agencies; Ministry of Construction and Urban development; Ministry of Mining; other line ministries), land users, NGOs, and private sector, these groups innovatively included community organizations such as the Union of Agriculture Cooperatives; Union of Natural Resource Management Groups; and Protected Areas administration. Key evaluation criteria ensured their effectiveness, aligning with project objectives, state organization functions, and stakeholder engagement plans. This inclusive approach led to increased commitment, with local governments co-financing 50 percent of aimag (province) and soum (county) land management plans.
- **Uzbekistan:** Uzbekistan's National LDN Target Setting process highlighted the need for improved inter-institutional coordination to manage natural resources to help reconcile water needs among different sectors and promote LDN compatible sustainable production landscapes and integrated watershed management. As such, the project supports the establishment of a Multi-Stakeholder Water Management Task Force (composed of project experts and technical personnel of partner institutions effectively working on the technical assessments) and a Multi-Stakeholder Committee (composed of representatives of line ministries; the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea; Amudarya Basin Water Organization; the relevant Basin Irrigation System Authorities; and Water Users Associations). The Task Force will facilitate consultation with the main stakeholders, with national and regional water management representatives. The Multi-Stakeholder Committee is expected to facilitate inter-institutional coordination and leverage the political will necessary for achieving LDN. At the district level, there are existing cross sectoral committees to enhance integrated land use and spatial planning, whose model should be replicated at the village level through the project.
- **Ecuador:** The project facilitates national LDN coordination by establishing intersectoral platforms to integrate LDN into existing processes and policies. Led by the Ministry of Environment, the national focal point for multilateral environmental agreements, collaboration with the Ministry of Livestock and Agriculture is emphasized. During implementation, Ecuador's national LDN target lacked clarity, prompting the need for a new, well-defined target requiring improved data and broad stakeholder input. To enhance LDN planning, Ecuador aims to strengthen coordination between the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, viewing it as a 'minimum requirement.' While involving more ministries is challenging, sub-national efforts focus on leveraging multi-level governance platforms for joint work among Decentralized Autonomous Governments, local stakeholders, and Indigenous organizations. This collaborative approach, in coordination with relevant ministries, aims to enhance LDN action at both national and sub-national levels.

3.2.2. Approaches for Local LDN Planning

The LDN concept requires application across spatial scales, which remains a central challenge for its proper implementation at local level. The following selected examples illustrate these

challenges, and how the LDN framework is being used to enable local planning. This includes, for instance, (i) addressing data constraints at the sub-national level which is making the target setting and planning process challenging (a common challenge for many UNCCD member countries), including through setting up strong vertical coordination mechanisms;[15] (ii) working with multiple stakeholders through socially inclusive approaches, including local governments, women, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations (CSOs); private sector; and, where present, Indigenous Peoples, in a way that fully integrates them as holders of valuable traditional knowledge on SLM which can inform decision-making, as well as actively engages them as environmental stewards; (iii) developing tools to integrate the LDN concept into local planning processes; and (iv) building the capacity and governance frameworks at local level to contribute to the continuous monitoring of progress towards LDN.

- **Ecuador:** The project adopts an inclusive approach in areas inhabited by Indigenous Peoples to ensure their effective participation, integrating traditional knowledge into decision-making for SLM. Civil society engages in activities such as socio-environmental analyses, identifying causes of land degradation, and characterizing impacts by gender, Indigenous Peoples, and fragile ecosystems. They also contribute to prioritizing SLM practices, conducting cost-benefit analyses, and formulating the LDN National Action Plan. The project focuses on collecting and systematizing traditional practices, facilitating technology dissemination, and fostering experience exchange. Additionally, the project aims to develop sub-national planning instruments, using the LDN concept to guide interventions. Guidelines will be created to integrate LDN into existing territorial planning tools, promoting multiple benefits and directing public investment through mechanisms like participatory budgets. Efforts span different government levels (province, canton, parish) and involve local governance platforms. The project supports methodological guidelines for mapping and quantifying baselines, monitoring indicators, and assessing progress toward neutrality goals within existing territorial planning instruments. Overall, the project strives for inclusive, knowledge-driven, and scalable approaches to achieve LDN objectives at both local and sub-national levels.
- **Uzbekistan:** The LDN concept is comparably well understood in Uzbekistan, associated with a strong recognition of land degradation and its significant impact in the country. The GEF project proposes to use an LDN-compatible, integrated land-water management approach as the basis for LDN and conservation. It focuses on developing a collaborative framework for efficient water management involving multi-stakeholder engagement, and balancing competing water needs between agriculture as a primary user, but also ensuring the necessary ecological flows needed for the preservation of lakes, wetlands, and riparian zones in the Amudarya basin and delta. It pilots the approach at district level, where it develops four LDN compatible gender-sensitive and climate-smart Integrated Water Management Plans. Uzbekistan will also focus on vertical coordination between the village, district, and national levels. As such, Uzbekistan will also develop sub-national LDN targets to align with the national LDN targets set in 2019. The sub-national targets plan to cover the two pilot districts. However, the process to determine the sub-national targets is foreseen as a challenge.

15 Vertical coordination refers to the links between different levels of governance e.g., local, sub-national, and national levels.

- **Türkiye:** Türkiye employs various spatial planning processes coordinated by the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning. Key tools include Integrated River Basin Management Plans, forest and agricultural development plans, and Integrated Coastal Management Plans. A new Strategic Spatial Planning approach is being piloted for more local participation. As land degradation involves multiple sectors, aligning LDN priorities with existing plans is crucial. However, given diverse planning levels and institutions, improved horizontal and vertical coordination is necessary. The project aids regional and national institutions in integrating LDN into plans for effective land degradation management coupled with land use planning, emphasizing the importance of harmonizing efforts across sectors and landscapes.
- **Burundi:** The Burundi project identifies the Batwa people as a key beneficiary group. Considering their significant level of vulnerability and exclusion, the project not only sets in place measures which ensure their meaningful participation in consultations, but also makes special provisions to ensure the Batwa can access labor opportunities, including in forestry management and plantation, and saving schemes, in the same way as other project beneficiaries. Moreover, the project's approach promotes local communities' role in project decision-making and to overall peacebuilding at the local level. It facilitates the inclusion of all actors in a structured community mobilization and beneficiary selection process that hinges on (i) equitable distribution across the unit target area; (ii) vulnerable groups (including Batwa people); and (iii) improved grievance redress and conflict mitigation (adopting community recognized vehicles). To date, the project has demonstrated positive results of its inclusive approach. For instance, the project provided marginalized Batwa communities living at the outskirts of protected areas cash-for-work opportunities that have been changing livelihoods through new revenue streams for target beneficiaries. Batwa people reported being able for the first time to purchase land, send their children to school, and purchase clothing.[16]

3.2.3. Addressing Land Tenure Through LDN

The issues surrounding land tenure were not found to be frequently addressed at project concept stage, which may indicate that LDN Guidelines are not always used in their entirety. If those Guidelines were followed, land tenure should be considered.[17] In full project designs, however, land tenure considerations were more frequently mentioned. However, challenges remain to directly addressing barriers associated with land tenure. Indeed, addressing land tenure is a complex process, with needs which vary widely across jurisdictions. Interviewees perceived land tenure issues as being far beyond the scope of individual projects, needing to be tackled on a case-by-case basis, and requiring significant engagement of local government. Indeed, land tenure is an important enabling condition and can be a significant barrier to achieving LDN. However, land tenure issues cannot be fully addressed through individual projects alone.

Yet, some LDN projects have demonstrated successful approaches to tackling land tenure issues and promote responsible and inclusive governance, which can have deep impacts on local communities and promote gender equality, amongst other benefits. Indeed, considering

16 World Bank. 2023. "Burundi Landscape Restoration and Resilience Project (P160613) Implementation Status and Results Report."

17 Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the GEF. April 2020. "Guidelines for Land Degradation Neutrality." Appendix 1.

land tenure as part of the gender analysis during project preparation was found to be a good practice. Three examples are presented here:

- **Burundi:** In Burundi, land tenure was considered a key barrier to achieving LDN, with limited access and control over sources of production for women, Batwa, and young people. In line with the 2011 Land Code, recent land certification projects followed a series of rigorous steps, which promote inclusiveness and accessibility of the process through consultation and participation, community verification of the results, an appeal mechanism, dispute resolution, and links to be reinforced with a national registration system. These early interventions contributed to building a majority of supportive views for the inclusion of women on the land certificates in the country, and the GEF project was in a position to build on this momentum to scale up these successes. As such, the Burundi project set out to support an inclusive, transparent, and participatory land certification process. Strategic partnerships and co-financing enabled tackling land tenure more effectively, and more than 93,000 land certificates (from an initial target of 14,000) were secured. Of these, 70% included the name of both spouses, a remarkable result supporting gender equality. Indeed, project beneficiaries have noted that land certificates can create opportunities to access sources of finance otherwise inaccessible.[18]
- **Ecuador:** The Ecuador project addresses land tenure challenges through two key strategies. First, it supports property regularization by leveraging specific investments within the project's timeframe to streamline access to land, such as updating property records in municipal cadastres. Information from project-supported farm plans serves as a potential entry point for local land tenure regularization programs, facilitating processes like property georeferencing in collaboration with local governments. Second, the project conducts training to enhance producers' understanding of property rights, emphasizing women's participation. In Ecuador, the project prioritizes local-level interventions over national approaches for a more relevant and practical impact on land tenure issues.
- **Nauru:** Nauru has an elaborate and clear cadastral system based on matrilineal lineage that has been maintained since the precolonial administration. Legislation regulating land use and management mostly relates to mining, leasing of land for mining, restoration post-mining, and land ownership and control. The Nauru Lands Committee Amendment Act 2012 established the Nauru Lands Committee and assigned it all matters related to ownership and lease of land. The Nauru Law of Property Act 1925 regulates land ownership and all transactions related to it. Owing to the historic importance of phosphate mining, the Land Act 1976/2011 identifies the land use types as phosphate bearing, non-phosphate bearing land, and worked-out phosphate bearing land and mandates land restoration after the completion of mining. As such, the project does not directly address land tenure, but rather focuses on effective engagement with land users and landowners (through national consultations and participation on the project's technical advisory committee and project steering committee) to address LDN. The project will seek to determine and provide mechanisms to incentivize landowners to shift to more sustainable land management.

18 World Bank. Nov. 28, 2022. "Burundi: Certifying Land Ownership Protects the Landscape and Women as Well."

3.2.4. Using the LDN Framework to Enhance Policy Coherence

The LDN framework is being used effectively as an entry point to enhance policy coherence at national level for greater impact. This includes revising and updating regulatory frameworks; using the LDN framework to foster integration across the Rio conventions; making linkages to other priority areas based on context, such as food security, livestock and rangeland management, biodiversity conservation; and addressing perverse incentives. For instance, some projects are analyzing existing policy and legal frameworks and identifying entry points for LDN mainstreaming; while others go further and delve into enhancing policy coherence to address underlying barriers to achieving LDN; and others take into consideration the knock-on effects of eventual policy changes on institutional arrangements.

- **North Macedonia:** Issues of competition over resources (e.g., energy/fuel wood needs of local population and forestry, forestry and extensive grazing, fodder needs of extensive grazing and fodder supply by irrigated agriculture) are not recognized in the national policies and strategic planning of these sectors, although they may be considered in some cases at a local level. Thus, there is a need to update sector policies related to land use in order to ensure real "buy-in" and support. The project is conducting a review of ongoing legal, institutional, and capacity needs of land management sector including key opportunities and threats to achieving LDN at the national scale, as a first step to initiating changes in policies and legislation intended to support the realization of the policies related to SLM and sustainable forest management (SFM). It is anticipated that these changes will inevitably have a knock-on effect on the institutional structures and their mandates. Recognizing that changes in policy will, for example, require institutions to adjust their mandates and function, and changes in legislation will require different approaches to implementing them, the project also proposes to develop guidelines for revision of both North Macedonia's legal and institutional framework for SLM.
- **Mongolia:** The Mongolia project supports sustainable land use and biodiversity conservation by enhancing policies and regulations. It aligns with ongoing policy reforms, focusing on reducing livestock numbers in line with national targets. Key legislative areas targeted include the Taxation Law, Environmental Protection Law, Land Law, and Protected Areas Law. The project aims to integrate Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure and international treaties into land law revisions. Gender mainstreaming and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups are prioritized, involving the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Ministry of Education and Science, and local Gender Committees. This ensures a holistic approach to addressing social issues intertwined with sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation. The project leverages existing policy reform efforts for a more effective and coordinated impact.
- **Kazakhstan:** Policies designed to oversee land management typically attempt to limit movement, land carrying capacity, and the interaction of livestock within specific areas (protected reserves) or land classes (forestry, cropping, and wetlands). However, this does not take into consideration the evolutionary links between grasses/plants and their herbivore counterparts, the role of manure and droppings in nutrient cycles, or the significant biomass loads that these pastures and forest systems once carried. Therefore, the project targets the Land Code, Forest Code, Ecological Code and the

recently created Pastures Law (2017) and the gaps identified in the capacity to create incentives for these laws and regulations that address the rational use of pastures; maximum carrying capacity loads per hectare; desertification and monitoring of water use; and provide support systems which drive sustainable use and development. The project proposes to provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Ecology, Geology, and Natural Resources to advance related policies and legislation, aiming at developing revised policies and legislation for the forestry sector that incorporate ecosystem services.

- **Panama:** The Panama project aims to streamline LDN implementation by reforming policies and enhancing inter-institutional coordination between agricultural and environmental ministries. The project's first step involves creating a strategy to integrate SLM, climate-smart agriculture (CSA), and LDN approaches into key decision-making processes. Legal and normative reforms will address instruments causing land degradation, such as granting higher credits for larger deforested areas and a flawed norm on riparian forests that leads to inadequate riparian forest coverage in mountainous areas and excessive use of fertile soils downstream. By targeting these issues, the project seeks to improve policy coherence and overcome barriers to SLM, promoting sustainable land use practices and supporting LDN goals. Enhanced coordination and strategic reforms aim to create a more effective framework for addressing land degradation challenges in Panama.

3.2.5. Monitoring LDN in Practice

This sub-section looks at LDN monitoring and learning systems being supported by GEF projects. Monitoring LDN can be quite complex and requires extensive geospatial data; data systems; effective mechanisms to collect, manage, and process data; capacity to analyze data and to integrate that information for convention reporting and decision-making.[19] Projects proposed varied approaches to monitoring LDN, in line with national contexts and capacities. Interventions could be categorized as follows: (i) integration into existing national monitoring and reporting systems; (ii) development of new monitoring systems; and (iii) project-level monitoring only. Here, different examples of these types of interventions are presented, highlighting opportunities explored for synergies with other conventions, but also pointing out some potential challenges where future support may be required.

- **Nauru:** Nauru is currently at an earlier stage of setting up LDN monitoring systems than some other countries. In this context, the Nauru project will seek to strengthen an existing national environment portal by integrating LDN data. The intention is to utilize LDN indicators as well as other context specific indicators to monitor the results achieved under the project. A national geospatial web database will also be created, and the project will also support gathering baseline data and conducting landscape surveys. The existing portal and additional database will be hosted by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). SPREP will also facilitate capacity building on maintaining the database for government and project staff. Data will be owned by the Government of Nauru and managed, uploaded, and maintained by the Department of Lands Management & Survey (DLMS) GIS unit. With the capacity built through training, they will also be responsible for providing

19 Note that this learning initiative did not specifically look into UNCCD reporting by countries on LDN and other indicators.

guidance to the public on how to access information through a publicly available computer within the DLMS office.

- **Namibia:** This project design is quite unique in that it puts other MEAs within its Theory of Change, linked directly to LDN, as opposed to in parallel. As such, the project actively exploits synergies to set up LDN monitoring systems. It promotes a streamlined method for assessing and reporting across MEAs on spatially-explicit indicators such as location of hectares of productive land; globally important biodiversity; and where forests and woodlands as carbon sinks have been protected and restored, or degraded and lost. To achieve this, it works on improving coordination across government sectors at the national level. Prior to project interventions, environmental data was spread across various institutions (public, private, research) without proper coordination or systematic analysis and reporting, and there was a need for better integration. For example, many of the Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use sector commitments in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) overlap with LDN targets and can be met simultaneously in the same landscapes. Better planning and monitoring tools were needed to facilitate this integration, including GIS mapping and data collection protocols.
- **Kazakhstan:** One of the key challenges for LDN monitoring in the country had been to integrate environmental information across different jurisdictions. Indeed, while there were means and operational capacity to assess and monitor wider national ecological trends through government agencies with the mandate to do so, much of this information was gathered at the national level, with information flows between scientific data and observations, and land managers, was minimal. In response, the government of Kazakhstan has been proactive in adopting laws and regulations to better understand and address land degradation and ecosystem service flows, and curb unsustainable management practices. In this context, the project focuses on introducing participatory ecological and economic gender-sensitive monitoring systems that provide cost-effective means of gathering real-time data on landscape condition. Tools available to achieve this include, for instance, the FAO-developed Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands project,[20] together with World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies[21] tools, and Participatory Rangeland and Grassland Assessment methodology.[22] In terms of LDN indicators specifically, the project also lays the groundwork for capacity-building and inventory assessment of carbon stocks in the country and the design of a standardized soil organic carbon (SOC) monitoring system.
- **Türkiye:** In the project baseline, the Government of Türkiye had a long history of developing tools for monitoring land degradation and erosion. However, the soil data available was often incomplete, fragmented, and inaccessible to stakeholders engaged in the agricultural sector. This is where the LDN Decision Support System supported by the project had the potential to be particularly helpful (see also Box 2).

20 FAO. "Land Degradation Assessment in Dryland (LADA_Tools)." Accessed May 1, 2024.

21 WOCAT. Accessed May 1, 2024.

22 GEF. "Participatory Assessment of Land Degradation and Sustainable Land Management in Grassland and Pastoral Systems." Accessed May 1, 2024.

- **Ecuador:** The Ecuador project adopts a comprehensive three-fold strategy to monitor LDN indicators nationally and sub-nationally. First, it characterizes the current state of land degradation to establish national LDN targets. Second, it develops institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms at both levels, defining roles among ministries and sub-national actors for sustainable data management. The project establishes a National Land Degradation Observatory, a multi-actor network for continuous data collection. Sub-nationally, collaborations with academia, civil society, and local governments focus on characterizing land degradation in specific landscapes. Third, the project enhances technical capacity through bi-ministerial efforts and inter-institutional working groups. This includes joint spaces for harmonizing criteria, methodologies, and protocols for generating and managing LDN information. By integrating these elements, the project builds a robust monitoring framework, promoting effective national and sub-national LDN indicator tracking and reporting mechanisms in Ecuador.

Box 2: FAO Decision Support System in Türkiye

In Türkiye, the LDN Decision Support System (DSS) is a tool that allows any user to select a particular area of interest - such as a water catchment - and obtain summary statistics, charts, and tables integrating the available data. One of its key functionalities is the ability to query the LDN DSS to show areas that meet certain criteria. The system allows decision-makers, for example, to identify and obtain maps of forests that have been improving in terms of productivity and that have the highest levels of SOC, which could be areas where to prioritize conservation measures for avoiding land degradation. Another important use of the LDN DSS is the monitoring and evaluation of land degradation at different spatial scales, providing managers and stakeholder opportunities to optimize and adapt land management. It also allows to effectively integrate different types and sources of information to report to international organizations, such as UNCCD, the custodian agency for LDN, which is target 15.3 of the 2030 Agenda. The LDN DSS can be easily updated and other strategic indicators can be added to better integrate the multiple sources and types of data, including key biodiversity areas, socioeconomic indicators, and climatic data.

In terms of implementation and operationalization, the MTR[23] found that the DSS will require extensive dissemination for its broader and regular usage amongst stakeholders. More technicians need to be trained and the DSS needs to be supported by a significant communications campaign including with non-state actors. Furthermore, the lessons and experience need to be documented and promoted. Critical collaborative governance between different actors (state, non-state, individuals, and the private sector) is necessary to address the collective action challenge that land degradation presents.

Despite these challenges, the MTR noted the following:

- The accessibility and flexibility of the tool suggests that users will continue to expand the application to address specific aspects of LDN in the future. The DSS's utility in reporting to the UNCCD and target setting at the national level will likely contribute to its uptake and broad usage within the framework of the UNCCD.
- The DSS lends itself to replication. The DSS has been adopted at the national level and will be used during the micro-basin planning exercises as well as having a broad range of useful applications for different aspects of the LDN planning and management processes. The Google Earth Engine app makes it a cheap and accessible tool as well as its capacity for evolving with and for new developments in LDN per se.
- The DSS developed under the project has broad applications in monitoring and evaluating land degradation at different spatial and institutional scales. It is adaptable for different data sets and M&E protocols such that it appears to have a universality and is already being adopted by other countries and in other regions and should inform the target setting process.

23 FAO. 2023. Mid Term Review of the Project "Contributing to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Target Setting by Demonstrating the LDN Approach."

3.2.6. Engaging With Private Sector Actors for LDN

Private sector actors' engagement is central to the success of LDN. Through GEF projects, countries are engaging with the private sector to better access markets, finance, and technologies, as well as to strengthen value chains. These efforts are intended to contribute to countries' actions to rehabilitate and restore land, as well as improve livelihood opportunities. As such, good examples of proposed engagement with different private sector actors across LDN projects are presented below.

- **North Macedonia:** The project identifies several types of private sector actors with a range of potential roles in LDN implementation. First, they identify potential partnerships with the North Macedonian Chamber of Commerce, American Chamber of Commerce in North Macedonia, Invest in Macedonia, and similar organizations and institutions to cooperate in communicating investment possibilities and being champions of the project activities. Second, associations such as the National Association of Private Forests Owners are identified as potential partners to provide advocacy to their wide membership. These actors are particularly important for attaining project outcomes where private sector land developers and users can be effectively encouraged to apply SLM/SFM best practices for mitigating erosion and degradation, as well as ensuring the application of LDN principles. The project proposes to support a dialogue between stakeholders on a sector-to-sector basis as well as multi-sector discussions to inform individual sector policy and strategic planning documents. The role of associations is considered key in fostering engagement in consultative processes, disseminating this information to members, and building capacity to support compliance.
- **Mongolia:** The Mongolia project targets sustainable rangeland management by promoting value chains and market incentives. It collaborates with meat and cashmere processing companies, along with the Sustainable Fibre Alliance, to establish sustainable practices. The project aids herder cooperatives in meeting codes of practice and certifications, facilitating access to premium export markets. It connects herders to processing facilities, offering assistance in meeting standards. Capacity-building for herder cooperatives, especially women-led ones, covers governance, business, and legal skills. Market access is improved, and partnerships with financing institutions are developed to provide affordable financing, including soft loans and credit saving cooperatives. Private sector engagement involves local crop companies, enhancing their practices with environment-friendly techniques. These companies contribute to technical guidelines and training programs, serving as role models for others. Overall, the project creates a sustainable ecosystem by aligning market forces with responsible livestock production, empowering herders and fostering environmentally-friendly practices in both processing and crop sectors.
- **Panama:** The Panama project acknowledges the pivotal role of the private sector in restoration and achieving LDN. It highlights successful landscape restoration by the Cooperativa de Productores de Leche R.L., particularly in aquifer recharge areas, as a model for large producer organizations. The project identifies private sector actors to promote sustainable pasture management and climate-smart practices. It plans to collaborate with organized producers in cooperatives, associations, and producer organizations, leveraging their financial support to extend SLM practices beyond

project funding. The project aims to convert farm plans into viable businesses through technical assistance, increasing SLM, CSA, and climate-smart livestock (CSL) adoption. Additionally, it actively involves banks and producer companies in measuring carbon and water footprints, integrating certification schemes for reduced carbon footprint to facilitate access to carbon markets and national banks. This multi-faceted approach ensures private sector engagement and financial sustainability for widespread adoption of environmentally-friendly practices.

- **Burundi:** Different institutions and coffee value-chain stakeholders contribute to implementing Burundi's strategic directions on ecological coffee production and specialty coffee markets. Indeed, over the years, the sector has opened to private investors for transformation and export, and has seen the emergence of producer organizations, private sector-led governance structures, as well as an expansion of business networks. The project proposed to engage with the private sector, including cooperatives, at three levels: (i) in the Kayanza Province, relevant private sector entities operating in these landscapes were involved, on a voluntary basis, in integrated landscape planning, technically supporting and supervising physical landscape restoration activities and, if relevant, technical activities to promote SLM practices (e.g. training/ communication) and related livelihood promotion; (ii) at the national level, the private sector participates, on a voluntary basis and as industry stakeholders, in training, knowledge exchange, dialogue, and promotion activities; and (iii) building on the previous level, the project involves private sector stakeholders in the regional and global training, knowledge exchange, dialogue, and promotion activities organized by the global Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR) platform.

3.2.7. Leveraging Innovative Financing Mechanisms for LDN

Multiple projects set out ambitious plans to develop innovative financial mechanisms to support LDN, including the development of bankable projects for private sector financing. Here, we present different mechanisms being proposed by countries, adapted to their individual contexts, and identify some of the challenges which may exist to the long-term financial sustainability of proposed interventions.

- **Nauru:** The Theory of Change presented in the project document clearly defines the role of LDN in working towards sustainable financing of SLM and biodiversity conservation. It highlights that sustainable financing needs to be embedded in a spatial planning context if it is to effectively support environmental objectives. In a context where 70% of the island has been mined for phosphate, this practice played a significant role in land degradation and biodiversity loss, which needs to be addressed if LDN is to be achieved at a national level. As such, the project will focus on establishing new financial support mechanisms and incentives that promote the adoption of SLM practices on mined sites and support livelihoods to landowners, farmers, and small business owners, including women. Specifically, in consultation with the Division of Commerce and the private sector in Nauru, a grant mechanism will be developed to provide support to landowners based on a competitive selection. In addition, funding to support small businesses on SLM (e.g, agroforestry, organic farming, horticulture, etc.) will be provided based on the submission of

competitive business plans. Finally, for this microfinance scheme, the Department of Environment Management and Agriculture has agreed to establish a Climate Change and Protection Fund under which a sub-fund will be created. The reflow from the loans issued will be disbursed back to this sub-fund.

- **Namibia:** The project adopts a comprehensive strategy to ensure financial sustainability for LDN interventions, addressing barriers from public, private, and international sources. The project employs various approaches, including Targeted Scenario Analysis to showcase the economic value of biodiversity and ecosystem services. High-level events raise awareness and drive momentum for nature-based enterprises, while support to the Environmental Investment Fund (EIF) helps communities access grants and loans for integrated landscape management. Partnerships with commercial and development banks aim to create a pipeline of bankable projects and provide technical assistance for de-risking investments. The project also explores a Community Forest Management Fund, conducts a feasibility study, and pilots a revenue generation model through sustainable charcoal production. The EIF plays a key role in establishing funding vehicles for environmental management, granting access to communities across five landscapes in Namibia. Despite financial risks like staffing challenges and delayed disbursement, the project mitigates issues by recruiting a technical specialist for grant administration and implementing adaptive strategies. Over 47 grant beneficiaries and 214 applicants have been trained, with 12 grants awarded.
- **Mongolia:** The project established risk funds to finance pasture management activities (co-financed by local government (county or soum level) or herder groups), similar to the Livestock Risk Management Fund currently piloted under the Green Pasture Pilot and other similar past projects. A risk fund is a community fund set up by the community/local leaders with contributions from communities, local government, and other sources of funding, where community members can apply for small-scale funding for pasture management activities, sustainable haymaking, protection/rehabilitation of water sources, etc. The risk funds help ensure that communities have funding to implement the pasture management plans, and allows consideration for specific needs of pastoralists, such as the seasonality of incomes.
- **Panama:** The Panama project aims to promote SLM with a CSA and CSL approach, executed by Fundación NATURA. It supports grassroots action, empowering government institutions, NGOs, community-based organizations, and producers in developing investment plans for sustainable land development. To facilitate financing for SLM/CSA/CSL practices, the project formalizes agreements with public and private banks. This involves defining eligible practices, setting terms, and ensuring clear procedures. The project also focuses on training producers in financial tools, facilitating measurement and certification of good SLM practices, and enhancing women's access to financial services. Special attention is given to bridging the credit gap for rural women by incorporating land rental as collateral in innovative financial instruments. Additionally, the project strengthens the technical and administrative capacities of women's organizations to enhance value-added ventures and market access for products from SLM and restored systems.

3.2.8. Improving Drought Resilience

LDN projects address drought and drought resilience to some extent through multiple means, including SLM (drought-smart land management); water conservation measures; and ILUP which considers integrated water resources management. Examples of interventions aimed at improving drought resilience are presented below:

- **Kazakhstan:** To increase resilience to droughts, the project focuses on soil and water management strategies. It follows the principles of soil management applied in Biosaline Agriculture Prospects, where soils suffering from high levels of salinity in the drylands near the Caspian Sea, Aral Sea, and Balkhash Lake are being considered for the planting of drought-resistant plants. The latter can be used for more effective waste-free feeding of livestock and be processed into food products for human consumption in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Examples of such plants are artichoke; mung bean; amaranthus; sorghum; quinoa; and millet. Thus, by building capacity among agricultural specialists and introducing innovative methods of irrigation and production, such as mixed strip planting with the usage of halophytes, it is possible to increase biomass production; reduce feed production costs; maintain a forage base for livestock in drought conditions; improve soil organic matter; and reduce soil salinity.
- **Uzbekistan:** To address progressive land degradation and water scarcity, Uzbekistan is striving for a fundamental change water management, in particular irrigation. To tackle water scarcity and drought, the project relies on existing climate risk profiles/studies (elaborated within the framework of other projects) and the project's own land/water and climate risk assessments to evaluate changes in the risk of drought occurrence and devise adaptive solutions that consider different water needs within the landscape. It takes into consideration not only agricultural water needs, but also the provision of adequate supply of water to lakes, wetlands, and riparian zones, aligned with the prevent-reduce-restore LDN framework. The project will also address unrationalized and unsustainable use of water resources by developing a collaborative framework for efficient water management involving multi-stakeholder engagement. It will develop an Integrated Management Framework covering the entire irrigated area of the landscape, followed by four LDN compatible gender-sensitive and climate-smart Integrated Water Management Plans at the target districts level.
- **Ecuador:** The project aims to ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production; help maintain ecosystems; strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding, and other disasters; and progressively improve land and soil quality. As part of the efforts to tackle the impacts of drought, the project proposes to strengthen institutional capacities to include the important advances made in some monitoring processes, such as the desertification and drought modelling processes implemented by the Ministry of the Environment and Water and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock respectively, into an indicator monitoring system to assess LDN progress at the national level.

- **Panama:** Panama initiated the National Action Program (NAP) to Combat Drought and Desertification (2014-2022), outlining five key priorities: maintaining or enhancing ecosystem service balance; boosting productivity for food security; increasing land and people resilience; seeking synergies with other objectives; and strengthening responsible land governance. Barriers to effective implementation include a lack of knowledge among rural producers and local authorities regarding the impacts of unsustainable soil and water management. To address this, the project aims to develop digital tools and provide direct technical assistance to basin committees and producers. These tools will offer essential information, including guidance on proactive drought management, agroclimatic data, rainfall forecasts, early drought warnings, solar radiation, and hotspots. By enhancing access to valuable information, the project seeks to overcome knowledge gaps and improve the implementation of the NAP in Panama.
- **Burundi:** In nearly every decade for the past 60 years, Burundi has experienced alternating cycles of flooding and drought, as well as an overall increase in mean temperatures and the length of the dry season accompanied by landslides. The project therefore focuses on providing technical solutions such as assisting farmers in accessing improved seeds (including drought-resistant varieties to help farmers adapt to droughts exacerbated by climate change). In addition, the project supports landscape restoration and erosion control activities/works such as the construction of terraces on degraded hillsides and augmented vegetation cover at critical points in the landscape. This should, in turn, help prevent future soil erosion, conserve soil moisture, reduce surface runoff, and help build resilience to climate change risks such as increased torrential rains and droughts.

3.2.9. Gender

Gender is being addressed extensively across projects. The barriers facing women to actively engage in supporting LDN are often broadly similar across projects, with some local nuances which are carefully considered to tailor project interventions. Some interventions are truly gender-responsive. Indeed, the way these barriers are being tackled through LDN projects vary, with some entry points including, for instance: engagement of women in monitoring and knowledge management to foster capacity development; tackling land tenure issues through policy interventions, awareness raising, and/or support for land registration; and many more described in the examples below.

- **North Macedonia:** The project supports gender equity in natural resource management, research, planning, and decision-making. It proposes to systematically document women's knowledge and expertise in natural resources management in rural communities. Project activities are aimed at empowering and assisting women in their role as local natural resource managers and identifying strategies to help rural women achieve sustainable livelihoods. The project also supports women's organizations and networks working on environmental issues, with the aim of raising awareness on both the importance of nature preservation and the importance of women to achieving that objective. Project activities recognize gender-differentiated roles, skills, and practices in the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources (biodiversity, water resources, etc.). Finally, the project engages women in

monitoring and evaluation of pilot projects, and in dissemination of good practices in neighboring rural areas.

- **Namibia:** Namibia's social landscape is characterized by gender inequalities in relation to land and land-based resources. There remain extreme gender gaps in the traditional authorities' governance structures, which are the primary institutions mandated to administer land and land-based resources in the communal areas. Similarly, the institutions managing forest resources at community level, especially the Community Forests, are dominated by men and gendered inequalities persist in access, control, monitoring, and use of forest resources. To address these challenges, the project has established a partnership with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare to create awareness and empower women. Two workshops have so far been conducted with a total of 70 women benefiting from these workshops,[24] which have contributed to changing women's perception of their roles in society and agriculture. The knowledge and skills acquired have enabled them to understand their human rights; how to make their voices heard; and their role in development issues. From the second training which focused on women in business, it has been noted that a group of women have realized the importance of education and wish to establish a daycare unit within their village. Project interventions made so far include enhancing access to finance; goat recipients;[25] trainings; workshops; and learning exchange visits. Some women have been observed to now take part of decision-making structures for natural resources management at the local level.
- **Nauru:** In Nauru, women are constrained by underrepresentation in policy-making and senior management positions; wage discrimination and limited access to the job market; and limited representation in land use decisions, amongst others. Due to weakly developed financial systems and lack of collateral and financial skills, women lack access to capital and technologies. Nauru has consequently developed a draft National Strategy on Women's Economic Empowerment which focuses on better working conditions and employment opportunities; training for women in the technical and management fields; and better access to finance and saving schemes. The project strategy is aligned with this National Strategy and proposes to establish special provisions for women to be primary targets of the project's financial incentive mechanisms to support livelihoods and SLM.
- **Mongolia:** Through the development of the cashmere value chain supported by the project, women were actively engaged in SLM activities, and tailored trainings were provided. The project has been focusing on improving the quality of cashmere and wool products, as well as decreasing negative impacts of production on the dryland landscape. The government of Mongolia is interested in scaling up this successful approach in other areas.
- **Kazakhstan:** The project targets women for capacity development and awareness raising in SLM/LDN at national and sub-national levels, so that they are better positioned to contribute to decisions. The project also aims to contribute to the gender policies of the Government of Kazakhstan by responding to the creation

24 Namibia Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism. 2022. Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty (NILALEG) Project Gender Assessment Report

25 UNDP. March 8, 2022. "Livelihood Pathways for Women in Fragile Landscapes towards a Sustainable Tomorrow."

of equal access to financial services, productive resources including land, trade and entrepreneurship, equal access and control over clean water, energy, transport infrastructure, and equitable engagement in their management, as well as equal rights to participate in and influence decision-making processes on climate and environmental issues. The project is designed to promote sustainable and fair employment opportunities for women including in planting trees and establishment of the forestry nursery; facilitate women's participation in trainings on innovative agroforestry techniques; and conduct active recruitment into natural resource management groups to help increase women's participation in the formulation and implementation of environmentally sound forest management plans.

- **Uzbekistan:** The project design mainstreams gender dimensions in the project activities, such as: (i) expansion of microfinance projects and sub-loans for women entrepreneurs; (ii) stimulating an increase in the number of small business enterprises headed by women in the areas of consumer goods production, food production, and agricultural production; (iii) increasing the number of female farmers by developing conditions for women to use property and assets as collateral and seed money, developing time management skills, improving knowledge on use of bank loans and marketing and sales management, etc.; (iv) development of women's family budget management skills; (v) expanding access of rural women to housing loans (improved housing situation in rural areas sharply increased the quality of life of rural families and reduced the household chores burden on women, freeing up time, which many women may use to set up home-based businesses); and (vi) providing opportunities for women to learn about LDN and SLM measures and resilient livelihoods and integrate best practices into their farming practices.
- **Türkiye:** The project proposed to support interventions that will contribute to inclusion of women in governance of land and forest resources; and support their involvement in SLM and SFM. The activities of the project should result in increased household incomes, both through cost reductions and productivity increases, and should increase employment opportunities in rural areas for women. The project will seek to raise awareness of gender issues in participating ministries by including women in all activities, including demonstrations, trainings, and other capacity-building activities. To date, the project has produced a gender report and strategy related to LDN, which has raised awareness of the role and position of women in the agricultural sector as well as highlighted the disparities and inefficiencies associated with gender inequality. The MTR noted that working with women's groups and expanding the activities to include process interventions (e.g. support with empowerment and involvement in establishing cooperatives, etc.) will likely increase the project's impact.
- **Burundi:** According to the gender gaps identified in the country, the project's gender strategy has four lines of actions: (i) to develop institutional capacity on the links between gender and landscape restoration activities at the national and local level; (ii) to promote the participation and leadership of women and their organizations in actions related to landscape restoration; (iii) to promote knowledge exchange and communication in relation to the application of the gender and equity approach; and (iv) to institutionalize the gender approach in the management of the program.

4. Lessons Learned

This section of the report discusses the lessons learned from implementing LDN at national and local levels through GEF projects. It highlights the need for adaptive processes due to complexity of LDN, which has varying translations at sub-national levels and has evolved over the past eight years. Furthermore, it discusses the positive impact of LDN guidelines on project designs, along with concerns about confusion and usefulness of these guidelines in operations. Governance challenges are analyzed, advocating for tailored approaches and leveraging existing institutions. LDN's role in policy coherence and its potential to address cross-sectoral topics are examined, highlighting the long-term nature of these processes. The report also identifies challenges and information gaps in setting and monitoring voluntary LDN targets, underscoring the importance of strong data and inclusivity for sustainable impact. Overall, the section provides a comprehensive overview of the early lessons from the GEF LDN portfolio, emphasizing the contextual nature of LDN implementation, and the persistent need for effective knowledge management in this space.

4.1. LDN Is a Scientific Concept That Needs to Be Tailored to National and Local Realities

- Countries are spending resources, including time, to operationalize the LDN concept. This operationalization includes the translation of the concept to various ministries at the decision-making level, and to lower administrative and technical levels. This operationalization also needs awareness building to popularize the LDN concept to broader publics.
- The LDN concept remains a complex term to understand. In several situations, the concept was more simply translated at sub-national level, as "sustainable land management," "restoration," or "sustainable production," simultaneously losing some of its most crucial elements.
- The operationalization of the LDN concept must be an adaptive process depending on the context (political, institutional, economic, environmental, social), including the size of the country and the prominence of land degradation issues in the country. There is no blueprint for best set-up for LDN target implementation. In a country like Uzbekistan for instance, the visibility of land degradation in the country makes the LDN concept easier to understand by policymakers.
- All in all, the LDN concept is perceived now as a "trademark" thanks to all the efforts from countries and the UNCCD over the last eight years; To maintain its branding, the UNCCD needs to put in continuous efforts and implement an effective communication strategy.

4.2. LDN Guidelines Have a Positive Impact on Effective Integration of the LDN Concept in Project Designs

- STAP published a set of guidelines for LDN[26] in November 2019, followed by a technical report for those guidelines in April 2020.[27] Since then, the mention of use of these guidelines in project concepts has steadily increased, with projects expressly using these guidelines scoring much higher on average in terms of their level of LDN concept integration (as mentioned in the results of the desk review in section 2). It is, however, too early to assess if this effective integration of the LDN concept at project design stage translates to better projects on the ground.
- On the flip side, the various checklists and guidelines available means different stakeholders can be confused as to where to access the most relevant information.
- Checklists and guidelines are not all fit-for-purpose, with a noted lack of practice-oriented guidance for countries. Countries could benefit from practical guidance on designing and implementing ILUP to support decisions on LDN interventions, amongst others.
- It is necessary to target future guidance on the neutrality mechanism. The analysis revealed that countries are using several landscape management approaches, including ILUP. Nonetheless, countries are not systematically analyzing trade offs between different demands for land uses, across multiple sectors. A neutrality analysis is valuable to define competing interests between the Rio Conventions, and the identification of synergies in a landscape.
- It is necessary to provide future guidance on the causal pathways in the theory of change between drought resilience and LDN. Assisting countries to approach drought through resilience planning requires articulating pathways based on future risks (climate and non-climate) so that land rehabilitation, or land restoration, produces positive outcomes which are sustained in the long-term.

4.3. Governance for LDN Is Multi-dimensional and Needs to Take into Consideration Vertical Coordination, Cross-Sectoral (Horizontal) Coordination, Planning Processes, Land Tenure, and Monitoring

- Country-level implementation of LDN requires processes that are tailored to each country.
- A thorough diagnosis of different dimensions of land governance is required upfront to identify entry points for supporting the development, or strengthening, of the enabling environment for LDN.
- The LDN implementation process is not necessarily a stepwise approach, and definitely not a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.
- Different dimensions of land governance which need to be taken into consideration for LDN, and which are common entry points currently being addressed by countries, include: enhancing vertical coordination (including for target setting and

26 Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the GEF. Nov. 2019.
27 Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the GEF. April 2020.

subsequent monitoring); creating mechanisms for more inclusive horizontal (or cross-sectoral) coordination; implementing integrated land use planning; and developing monitoring systems.

- There is a need to leverage existing and planned institutions, mechanism, and systems to ensure there is no duplication of efforts, and that there is no significant additional bureaucratic burden added through LDN implementation.
- Effective cross-sectoral coordination is difficult to achieve in practice and may be highly dependent on which institutions are engaged, as well as the convening power of the different mechanisms.

4.4 LDN Is an Effective Entry Point to Facilitate Work on Enhancing Policy Coherence

- Initial progress can be seen in mainstreaming the LDN concept into national policy frameworks. However, this is not systematic across all projects as some projects work around the existing frameworks and align their project accordingly.
- LDN provided the countries with the opportunity to work—and address enhanced policy coherence—across ministries and agencies on multi-sectoral topics related to biodiversity; climate change mitigation; adaptation; drought; agriculture and livestock; and forests, through different means including land use planning. In many instances, LDN was a strong entry point for collaboration between agriculture ministries and environmental ministries.
- Specific topics such as food security, water security, and other development goals were found to be good entry points to start mainstreaming LDN.
- Enhancing policy coherence is a long-term process, which needs efforts at country level and needs to be continuously promoted.
- Effectively designing LDN multi-thematic projects to exploit synergies with other conventions remains challenging and the potential for impact depends on local contexts and having the right enabling conditions in place.
- Monitoring is a key entry point for leveraging synergies with other MEAs.

4.5 Numerous Challenges and Information Gaps Still Exist in Setting, Updating, Revising, and Monitoring Voluntary LDN Targets

- Having access to reliable data is a key enabler for informed decision-making at all levels, including for private sector actors.
- The application of ILUP, which is key to achieving LDN, requires the use of the best information available on land degradation status and trends; land use changes; land productivity dynamics; land tenure; soil organic carbon; land potential; socioeconomic data; and gender.
- There remains significant variability in data accessibility between countries, from defining baselines to monitoring progress against targets.
- Access to geospatial data, which is central to the implementation of the counterbalancing mechanisms of LDN (i.e., to identify gains and unavoidable

land degradation), appears particularly challenging. This also affects reporting of geospatial data in the context of reporting LDN target achievement to UNCCD. For example, Türkiye, Panama, and Ecuador were able to report geospatial data through PRAIS4 supported by the DSS developed by FAO through GEF-funded projects.

- Voluntary LDN targets often need updating or revising, for example in cases where indicators were poorly defined or are difficult to measure.

4.6 Fostering an Inclusive Approach through LDN Is Essential to Ensure Sustainability and Impact

- Recognizing and engaging with multiple stakeholders throughout project design, implementation and monitoring stage is a key entry point to build ownership and support the long-term sustainability of interventions to achieve LDN. Stakeholder engagement needs to be context specific and based on local and regional conditions, supported by sound data and analysis.
- Some projects' inclusive approaches promote the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in project design, implementation and monitoring and overall conflict mitigation at the local level, which contribute to sustainability and impacts of the LDN projects.
- It is critical to address challenges of gender engagement associated with cultural norms to achieve inclusivity and equal representation. In turn, successful approaches that support active engagement of women in livelihood activities, technical training, awareness raising, and monitoring can contribute to the sustainability and impact of projects.
- Private sector actors' engagement is also central to the success of LDN implementation, not only in terms of leveraging finance but also in providing technical expertise and capacity building, technological solutions, and fostering innovation.
- Projects that successfully identify opportunities and promote private sector engagement can provide land users with access to markets and additional livelihood opportunities that can generate income and make land restoration economically viable and sustainable in the long run.
- It is relevant to encourage continued monitoring of the role of the private sector in supporting LDN to better understand the challenges, potential trade-offs, and opportunities in terms of demonstrating and scaling impact.
- Fostering inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement is a difficult task which requires intensive resources (time, effort, and finance), and proper incentives.

5. Implications of Emerging Lessons

This section underscores the imperative for a heightened focus on implementation, recognizing the absence of a universal blueprint, and advocating for adaptive processes tailored to each country's unique geographical and contextual characteristics. Knowledge management can play an important role in scaling impact through LDN and needs to be carefully integrated to optimize LDN implementation globally by fostering learning and collaboration.

The following are specific considerations for the GEF's engagement with countries, the UNCCD, and partner agencies and organizations in navigating the operationalization of LDN.

5.1. For the GEF's Engagement With Countries

UNCCD parties adopted the COP decision to formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN. So far 131 countries have committed to setting voluntary LDN targets and more than 100 countries already formulated their targets. As such, initially, countries need technical support and tools to set the LDN baseline, assess land degradation trends, identify drivers of land degradation, and analyze the legal and institutional framework of land management and data sources, and set up, monitor, and update LDN targets. Below are a few orientations for countries as they move towards implementing LDN and achieving these targets.

- There is a need to place more emphasis on LDN implementation with a view towards enhancing synergies across multiple agendas, enhancing policy coherence, and implementing land use planning at the subnational level to ultimately achieve sustainable development. These potentially transformational changes will require extensive multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral engagement for their success.
- As there is no blueprint for LDN, countries should be enabled to set up a structured process adapted to their specific context. The preferred approach might be different or adjusted if managing LDN targets in a Small Island Developing State or a large dryland country, the highly fragmented landscapes (patchiness of different land use/cover types), and/or the morphology of the country (hilly/mountains areas) for example.

5.2. For the GEF's Engagement With the UNCCD

Enhancements in the following areas could be considered in order to improve the application of the LDN framework: (i) enhance the accessibility and appeal to the LDN framework for policy makers; (ii) integrate emerging issues such as proactive drought management into LDN and/or ensure close linkages; and (iii) leverage the links to the SDG 15.3, the CBD, the UNFCCC, and other environment conventions for synergies in sustainable development efforts.

A timely opportunity arises with the second phase of UNCCD's LDN Target Setting Program (LDN TSP 2.0), which was launched in 2023 following the mandate provided by the UNCCD COP 15 through a "Call for requests for support to assist countries in strengthening LDN

targets and integrated land use planning."[28] Under this program, the 18 participating countries will review, evaluate, and refine their voluntary national LDN targets as a way to demonstrate how to bring UNCCD implementation to the next level.

Additionally, to facilitate global progress, countries would benefit from practical, practice-oriented guidelines to implement LDN. Furthermore, establishing knowledge exchange mechanisms can foster collaboration between countries and regions and could help bring LDN to scale. These points are expanded upon below:

- The LDN concept should be better communicated to decision-makers as a politically attractive concept to enhance policy coherence and to ensure mainstreaming into and coordination with existing national plans and policies.
- The initial efforts that are being made to integrate emerging issues such as proactive drought management and drought resilience with LDN should be enhanced. The LDN framework can make contributions to drought resilience, through SLM, drought-smart land management, water resource management and conservation, ILUP, and in the process of stakeholder engagement and awareness raising.
- The link to SDG 15.3 should be better harnessed to foster synergies across conventions and using the LDN concept for working towards sustainable development.
- The provision of additional technical capacity building and support to establish baseline data would enable countries to monitor and report on LDN more effectively and facilitate tracking of global progress towards LDN in a timely manner.
- LDN guidelines which are more practice-oriented would enable countries to better integrate the concept in their existing frameworks. This could include, for instance, tools to enable assessments of the enabling environment to facilitate LDN implementation, analyzing policy alignment to foster integration and synergies across sectors, as well as reduce perverse incentives; quantifying land resources essential for sustaining ecosystem functions and services; and analyzing trade-offs between different land uses to counterbalance losses with gains. Another area of practice-oriented guidelines could be ILUP, which also encompasses, as inputs, an analysis of policies, stakeholder engagement, set-up of good governance structures, capacity needs assessment, and monitoring and learning systems to support decision making.
- Knowledge exchange mechanisms on LDN could be established between countries, as well as across and within regions, to identify opportunities and barriers to scaling innovation or replicating best practices.

5.3. For the GEF Partnership

For the GEF partnership, it is proposed to evaluate the possibility of a knowledge exchange mechanism for LDN to enhance learning. Also of relevance would be the facilitation of better utilization of the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure[29] and its technical guide in the context of LDN[30], stressing the role of CSOs in fostering fostering multi-stakeholder engagement, national coordination, women's tenure rights, and accountability framework. The

28 UNCCD. May 12, 2023. "Call for requests for support to assist countries in strengthening LDN targets and integrated land use planning."

29 FAO. 2022. "Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security."

30 UNCCD/FAO. 2022. "Technical guide on the integration of the voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests."

integration of the LDN concept into projects for national policy coherence and support for countries in establishing integrated land use planning using geospatial mapping with a cross-sectoral and vertical approach are also highlighted.

- Discuss the possibility of a knowledge exchange mechanism for LDN to enhance learning about best practices for LDN implementation, and feed experiences from projects into the WOCAT database.
- Facilitate the process for better utilizing the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance on Tenure and its technical guide in the context of LDN.
- CSOs should contribute to facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement, national and local level coordination in project design, implementation, and monitoring, securing women's tenure rights and access to land and natural resources, and accountability framework to integrate land tenure rights.
- The LDN concept needs to be systematically considered as an entry point to enhance national policy coherence of biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, water security, food security, socioeconomic benefits and others.
- Support countries in establishing ILUP using geospatial information, with a cross-sectoral and vertical approach. Geospatial information can be used to enhance transparency and accountability for land use planning.
- Support enhanced national and sub-national cross-sectoral coordination through LDN, as a means to exploit synergies across conventions.

5.4. For the GEF Secretariat

The GEF Secretariat is encouraged to continue providing customized learning opportunities tailored to local needs embedded in GEF projects and programs, aligning the GEF LDFA strategy with the evolving LDN concept, and creating space for awareness raising, innovation, and learning within projects. Systematic attention to land tenure in project design and implementation is encouraged, emphasizing collaboration with GEF agencies, countries, non state actors, and other relevant partners. Overall, these recommendations seek to enhance the efficacy of LDN implementation at the national and global levels, promoting adaptive strategies and collaborative efforts.

- The GEF Secretariat should continue to provide learning opportunities on LDN through GEF projects and programs, where advice is customized and translated to the needs of different stakeholders, all the way down to the local level.
- The GEF LDFA strategy should continue to be aligned to the LDN concept and consider expanding the concept to incorporate other emerging issues, such as drought resilience. Drought resilience is important for managing future risks that undermine land restoration, and countries' development needs.
- GEF projects should continue creating the space for awareness-raising, innovation, and learning. However, they cannot address the implementation of the entirety of LDN targets in countries.
- Land tenure should be more systematically addressed in project designs, implementation, and monitoring (in cooperation with GEF agencies and countries), when possible and relevant.

6. Conclusions

This learning initiative provides a first glimpse of the usefulness of the LDN concept in tackling land degradation in various contexts, and the way it is being adapted to meet the specific needs of countries.

Indeed, the analysis has underscored the importance of steering away from a rigid, step-by-step approach to LDN implementation. Emphasizing the significance of both theoretical guidelines for shaping project design, and the urgent need for practice-oriented guidelines for subsequent implementation, the report advocates for an inclusive assessment of LDN action entry points to take place within each country, as a means to prioritize actions to support achieving LDN targets.

The collaborative sharing of experiences and joint learning from ongoing projects emerges as essential for mainstreaming the LDN concept into project implementation and, ultimately, national policies. This dynamic learning process not only enhances the usefulness and wider application of LDN, but also serves as a valuable feedback mechanism, informing future strategies for achieving LDN.

As the GEF's LDN project portfolio matures and expands, both in terms of implementation progress and through the addition of new projects, more learning opportunities will arise and be taken up through various means.

The GEF partnership as an extensive global network of partners and stakeholders is uniquely positioned to facilitate the capture, transfer, uptake, and scale up of lessons learned; and to harness expertise, innovations, and best practices for achieving impactful outcomes to advance LDN implementation globally.

Annexes

7. Annexes

7.1. Annex 1 - List of Projects Included in the LDN Portfolio Review

GEFID	Project Title	Project Type	Country	Agency	Focal Area	Phase	Included in sample of 10 projects	Documents reviewed	Interviews conducted
11003	Sustainable Land Management to Strengthen Social Cohesion in the Drylands of Burkina Faso	FSP	Burkina Faso	UNDP	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10987	Integrated Natural Resource Management in Very Humid Climatic Regions of Eastern Black Sea Region in Turkey	MSP	Türkiye	UNDP	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10876	Sustainable Management and Restoration of Degraded Landscapes for Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in India	FSP	India	UNDP	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10866	Comprehensive land management in forestry and agri-food systems of three water basins in Argentina to contribute to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and to mitigation and adaptation to climate change	FSP	Argentina	CAF	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10863	Towards Land Degradation Neutrality for Improved Equity, Sustainability, and Resilience	FSP	Cabo Verde	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10858	Securing Climate-Resilient Sustainable Land Management and Progress Towards Land Degradation Neutrality in the Federated States of Micronesia	FSP	Micronesia	UNDP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No

GEFID	Project Title	Project Type	Country	Agency	Focal Area	Phase	Included in sample of 10 projects	Documents reviewed	Interviews conducted
10854	Conservation and Sustainable Management of Land Resources and High Value Ecosystems in Lake Sevan Basin for Multiple Benefits	FSP	Armenia	UNDP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10830	Creating an Enabling Environment to Support LDN Target Implementation Through Strengthening Capacities and Establishing an LDN Monitoring and Reporting System in Bosnia and Herzegovina	MSP	Bosnia-Herzegovina	UNEP	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10814	Enabling environment at policy, field and market levels for Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in Serbia	MSP	Serbia	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10757	Maintaining and Enhancing Water Yield through Land and Forest Rehabilitation (MEWLAFOR)	MSP	Indonesia	UNIDO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10732	Sustainable and Integrated Water Resource Management in Gediz River Basin in Turkey	MSP	Türkiye	FAO	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10723	Regeneration of Livelihoods and Landscapes (ROLL) Project	FSP	Lesotho	IFAD	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10708	Towards a Land Degradation-Neutral Azerbaijan	FSP	Azerbaijan	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10695	Restoration of ecosystems, integrated natural resource management and promotion of SLM in Mbuluzi River Basin of Eswatini	FSP	Eswatini	UNEP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10694	Integrated Landscape Management for Addressing Land Degradation, Food Security and Climate Resilience Challenges in The Bahamas	FSP	Bahamas	UNEP	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10693	Combating land degradation through integrated and sustainable range and livestock management to promote resilient livelihoods in Northern Punjab	FSP	Pakistan	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No

GEFID	Project Title	Project Type	Country	Agency	Focal Area	Phase	Included in sample of 10 projects	Documents reviewed	Interviews conducted
10692	Integrated Community-based Management of High Value Mountain Ecosystems in Southern Kyrgyzstan for Multiple Benefits	FSP	Kyrgyz Republic	UNDP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10678	Integrated management of multiple use landscapes and high conservation value forest for sustainable development of the Venezuelan Andean Region	FSP	Venezuela	FAO	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10672	Promotion of Integrated Biodiversity Conservation and Land Degradation Neutrality in Highly Degraded Landscapes of Iraq	FSP	Iraq	UNEP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10627	Programme to sustainably manage and restore land and biodiversity in the Guadalquivir Basin	MSP	Bolivia	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10608	Enabling Land Degradation Neutrality and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions in Cameroon's Sudano-Sahelian agro-ecological zone	MSP	Cameroon	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10594	Burundi Landscape Restoration and Resilience Project	FSP (Child)	Burundi	WB	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	Yes	Project Document PIR 2022 PIR 2023	Yes
10588	Sustainable land management and restoration of productive landscapes in river basins for the implementation of national targets of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in Panama	MSP	Panama	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	Yes	PIF Project Document Annex - Analisis de genero	Yes
10580	Integrated land management, restoration of degraded landscapes and natural capital assessment in the mountains of Papua New Guinea	FSP	Papua New Guinea	UNEP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10572	Integrated Landscape Management Gambia (INLAMAG) Project	FSP	Gambia	IFAD	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No

GEFID	Project Title	Project Type	Country	Agency	Focal Area	Phase	Included in sample of 10 projects	Documents reviewed	Interviews conducted
10533	Restoration of Degraded Natural Forests and Soil Erosion Management Improvement in Erosion-Prone Regions of China	FSP	China	UNDP	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10532	Securing Long-Term Sustainability of Multi-functional Landscapes in Critical River Basins of the Philippines	FSP	Philippines	UNDP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10469	Restoring the degraded watershed and livelihoods of Lakhandei river basin through Sustainable Land Management	MSP	Nepal	IUCN	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10444	Development of an integrated system to promote the natural capital in the drylands of Mauritania	FSP	Mauritania	IUCN	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10420	Promoting Sustainable Agricultural Production and Conservation of Key Biodiversity Species through Land Restoration and Efficient Use of Ecosystems in the Dallol Bosso and Surrounding Areas (PROSAP/COKEBIOS)	FSP	Niger	IFAD	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10393	Strengthening the integral and sustainable management of biodiversity and forests by indigenous peoples and local communities in fragile ecosystems of the dry forests of the Bolivia Chaco	FSP	Bolivia	FAO	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10384	Land Degradation Neutrality for biodiversity conservation, food security and resilient livelihoods in the Peanut Basin and Eastern Senegal (DÃ©kil Souf)	FSP	Senegal	FAO	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10367	Sustainable Forest and Rangelands Management in the Dryland Ecosystems of Uzbekistan	FSP	Uzbekistan	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10365	Implementation of Armenia's LDN commitments through sustainable land management and restoration of degraded landscapes	FSP	Armenia	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No

GEFID	Project Title	Project Type	Country	Agency	Focal Area	Phase	Included in sample of 10 projects	Documents reviewed	Interviews conducted
10356	Conservation and sustainable management of lakes, wetlands, and riparian corridors as pillars of a resilient and land degradation neutral Aral basin landscape supporting sustainable livelihoods	FSP	Uzbekistan	UNDP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	Yes	PIF Project Document and its annexes CEO Endorsement Request	Yes
10352	Conservation and Sustainable Management of Land Resources and High Nature Value Ecosystems in the Aral Sea Basin for Multiple Benefits	FSP	Turkmenistan	UNDP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10346	El Salvador Integrated Landscape Management and Restoration	FSP	El Salvador	World Bank	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10299	Kazakhstan Resilient Agroforestry and Rangeland Management Project	FSP	Kazakhstan	FAO and World Bank	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	Yes	Project Document Component 3 FAO CEO Endorsement PIR 2022 Project document components 1, 2, 4 WB	No
10249	Promoting Dryland Sustainable Landscapes and Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia	FSP	Mongolia	FAO and WWF	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	Yes	Project Document and its Annexes PIR 2022	Yes
10206	Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes	PFD	Global	FAO	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PFD	No
10201	Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration (FOLUR) Impact Program	PFD	Global	World Bank	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	No	PFD	No
10191	Moldova Agriculture Competitiveness Project GEF Additional Financing	FSP	Moldova	World Bank	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No

GEFID	Project Title	Project Type	Country	Agency	Focal Area	Phase	Included in sample of 10 projects	Documents reviewed	Interviews conducted
10184	LDN Target-Setting and Restoration of Degraded Landscapes in Western Andes and Coastal areas	FSP	Ecuador	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	Yes	PIF Project Document Annex - Indigenous people Annex - Gender Analysis	Yes
10161	Ecosystem Restoration and Sustainable Land Management to improve livelihoods and protect biodiversity in Nauru	FSP	Nauru	UNEP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-7	Yes	PIF CEO Endorsement Request Project Document and its Annexes	Yes
10151	Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality Targets of Georgia through Restoration and Sustainable Management of Degraded Pasturelands	MSP	Georgia	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-7	No	PIF	No
10020	Integrated Watershed Management for Improved Agro-pastoral Livelihoods in the Sepabala Sub-catchment	FSP	Lesotho	UNDP	Land Degradation	GEF-6	No	PIF	No
9759	Promoting Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Through Strengthening Legal and Institutional Framework, Capacity Building and Restoration of Most Vulnerable Mountain Landscapes	FSP	North Macedonia	UNEP	Land Degradation	GEF-6	Yes	Project Document and its Annexes CEO Endorsement Request PIR 2022	No
9745	Sustainable Land Management for Improved Livelihoods in Degraded Areas of Iraq	FSP	Iraq	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-6	No	PIF	No

GEFID	Project Title	Project Type	Country	Agency	Focal Area	Phase	Included in sample of 10 projects	Documents reviewed	Interviews conducted
9730	Generating Economic and Environmental Benefits from Sustainable Land Management for Vulnerable Rural Communities of Georgia	MSP	Georgia	UNEP	Land Degradation	GEF-6	No	PIF	No
9667	Sustainable Land Management in the Commonwealth of Dominica	MSP	Dominica	UNEP	Land Degradation	GEF-6	No	PIF	No
9586	Contributing to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Target Setting by Demonstrating the LDN Approach in the Upper Sakarya Basin for Scaling up at National Level	FSP	Türkiye	FAO	Land Degradation	GEF-6	Yes	PIF CEO Endorsement Request PIR 2021 PIR 2022 MTR	Yes
9426	Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty (NILALEG)	FSP	Namibia	UNDP	Multi Focal Area	GEF-6	Yes	PIF Project document and its Annexes CEO Endorsement Request PIR 2021 PIR 2022	No
9388	Land Degradation Neutrality of Mountain Landscapes in Lebanon	FSP	Lebanon	UNDP	Land Degradation	GEF-6	No	PIF	No
9293	Scaling up a Multiple Benefits Approach to Enhance Resilience in Agro- and Forest Landscapes of Mali's Sahel Regions (Kayes, Koulikoro and Ségou)	FSP	Mali	AfDB	Multi Focal Area	GEF-6	No	PIF	No
9239	Integrated Management of Peatland Landscapes in Indonesia (IMPLI)	FSP	Indonesia	IFAD	Multi Focal Area	GEF-6	No	PIF	No

7.2. Annex 2 – Project Ratings – Portfolio Review

GEF ID	Country	UNCCD Region	GEF Agency	Proposed pathways	Synergies	Trade-offs	Average
11003	Burkina Faso	Africa	UNDP	4	3	2	3.00
10987	Türkiye	Northern Mediterranean	UNDP	4	3	2	3.00
10876	India	Asia	UNDP	4	4	3	3.67
10866	Argentina	Latin America and the Caribbean	CAF	4	3	1	2.67
10863	Cabo Verde	Africa	FAO	4	4	3	3.67
10858	Micronesia	Asia	UNDP	4	4	2	3.33
10854	Armenia	Central and Eastern Europe	UNDP	4	3	2	3.00
10830	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Central and Eastern Europe	UNEP	4	2	2	2.67
10814	Serbia	Central and Eastern Europe	FAO	4	3	3	3.33
10757	Indonesia	Asia	UNIDO	3	1	2	2.00
10732	Türkiye	Northern Mediterranean	FAO	3	2	2	2.33
10723	Lesotho	Africa	IFAD	4	3	2	3.00
10708	Azerbaijan	Central and Eastern Europe	FAO	4	3	2	3.00
10695	Eswatini	Africa	UNEP	4	3	1	2.67
10694	Bahamas	Latin America and the Caribbean	UNEP	4	3	1	2.67
10693	Pakistan	Asia	FAO	3	3	2	2.67
10692	Kyrgyz Republic	Asia	UNDP	3	2	1	2.00
10678	Venezuela	Latin America and the Caribbean	FAO	3	3	1	2.33
10672	Iraq	Asia	UNEP	4	3	2	3.00
10627	Bolivia	Latin America and the Caribbean	FAO	4	3	3	3.33
10608	Cameroon	Africa	FAO	4	2	4	3.33
10588	Panama	Latin America and the Caribbean	FAO	3	3	2	2.67
10580	Papua New Guinea	Asia	UNEP	4	4	2	3.33
10572	Gambia	Africa	IFAD	4	4	2	3.33

GEF ID	Country	UNCCD Region	GEF Agency	Proposed pathways	Synergies	Trade-offs	Average
10533	China	Asia	UNDP	3	3	1	2.33
10532	Philippines	Asia	UNDP	4	3	1	2.67
10469	Nepal	Asia	IUCN	4	2	2	2.67
10444	Mauritania	Africa	IUCN	2	4	1	2.33
10420	Niger	Africa	IFAD	4	2	2	2.67
10393	Bolivia	Latin America and the Caribbean	FAO	3	2	2	2.33
10384	Senegal	Africa	FAO	4	4	2	3.33
10367	Uzbekistan	Asia	FAO	3	2	2	2.33
10365	Armenia	Central and Eastern Europe	FAO	3	2	2	2.33
10356	Uzbekistan	Asia	UNDP	4	3	1	2.67
10352	Turkmenistan	Asia	UNDP	4	2	2	2.67
10346	El Salvador	Latin America and the Caribbean	World Bank	4	2	1	2.33
10206	Global	Global	FAO	4	3	4	3.67
10201	Global	Global	World Bank	4	4	2	3.33
10191	Moldova	Central and Eastern Europe	World Bank	3	1	2	2.00
10184	Ecuador	Latin America and the Caribbean	FAO	4	3	2	3.00
10161	Nauru	Asia	UNEP	4	3	2	3.00
10151	Georgia	Central and Eastern Europe	FAO	4	2	2	2.67
10020	Lesotho	Africa	UNDP	2	3	1	2.00
9759	North Macedonia	Central and Eastern Europe	UNEP	3	2	2	2.33
9745	Iraq	Asia	FAO	3	2	2	2.33
9730	Georgia	Central and Eastern Europe	UNEP	3	3	1	2.33
9667	Dominica	Latin America and the Caribbean	UNEP	2	1	2	1.67
9586	Türkiye	Northern Mediterranean	FAO	2	2	2	2.00
9426	Namibia	Africa	UNDP	3	3	2	2.67
9388	Lebanon	Asia	UNDP	3	2	2	2.33
9293	Mali	Africa	AfDB	4	2	2	2.67
9239	Indonesia	Asia	IFAD	3	1	1	1.67

7.3. Annex 3 – Additional Considerations – Portfolio Review

GEF ID	Country	Word search finds: LDN guidelines	Word search finds: LDN checklist	There is a project Component/ Outcome/ or Output dedicated to mainstreaming of the LDN concept into national policy and regulatory frameworks	There is a project Component/ Outcome/ or Output dedicated to monitoring LDN (beyond the project M&E framework)	There is a project Component/ Outcome/ or Output dedicated to policy coherence such as proposed revisions to policies, set up of multi-stakeholder coordination, or other proxy which can explicitly contribute to policy coherence at national level	The project is an MFA with additional funding associated with (select): CBD/ UNFCCC/BRS/ Minamata/Other (specify)	Gender tag: i. Closing gender gaps in access to and control over resources;	Gender tag: ii. Improving women's participation and decision making;	Gender tag: iii. Contributing to social and economic benefits or services for women.
11003	Burkina Faso	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10987	Türkiye	No	No	No	No	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10876	India	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10866	Argentina	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	No	Yes	Yes
10863	Cabo Verde	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10858	Micronesia	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10854	Armenia	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10830	Bosnia-Herzegovina	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	No	Yes	Yes
10814	Serbia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	No
10757	Indonesia	No	No	No	No	No	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	No
10732	Türkiye	Yes	No	No	No	No	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10723	Lesotho	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10708	Azerbaijan	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	No	Yes	No
10695	Eswatini	No	No	No	No	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10694	Bahamas	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	No	Yes	Yes
10693	Pakistan	No	No	No	No	No	Not applicable	No	Yes	Yes
10692	Kyrgyz Republic	No	No	No	No	No	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10678	Venezuela	No	No	No	No	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10672	Iraq	No	No	No	No	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10627	Bolivia	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10608	Cameroon	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10588	Panama	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10580	Papua New Guinea	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes

GEF ID	Country	Word search finds: LDN guidelines	Word search finds: LDN checklist	There is a project Component/ Outcome/ or Output dedicated to mainstreaming of the LDN concept into national policy and regulatory frameworks	There is a project Component/ Outcome/ or Output dedicated to monitoring LDN (beyond the project M&E framework)	There is a project Component/ Outcome/ or Output dedicated to policy coherence such as proposed revisions to policies, set up of multi-stakeholder coordination, or other proxy which can explicitly contribute to policy coherence at national level	The project is an MFA with additional funding associated with (select): CBD/ UNFCCC/BRS/ Minamata/Other (specify)	Gender tag: i. Closing gender gaps in access to and control over resources;	Gender tag: ii. Improving women's participation and decision making;	Gender tag: iii. Contributing to social and economic benefits or services for women.
10572	Gambia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10533	China	No	No	No	No	Yes	Not applicable	No	Yes	Yes
10532	Philippines	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	CBD	No	Yes	Yes
10469	Nepal	No	No	No	No	No	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10444	Mauritania	No	No	No	No	No	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10420	Niger	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10393	Bolivia	No	No	No	Yes	No	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10384	Senegal	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10367	Uzbekistan	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10365	Armenia	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10356	Uzbekistan	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10352	Turkmenistan	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	CBD	No	Yes	Yes
10346	El Salvador	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	No
10206	Global	No	No	No	No	Yes	SFM drylands			
10201	Global	No	No	No	No	Yes				
10191	Moldova	No	No	Yes	No	No	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
10184	Ecuador	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	No	No	Yes
10161	Nauru	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	CBD	Yes	Yes	Yes
10151	Georgia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	No
10020	Lesotho	No	No	No	No	No	Not applicable			
9759	North Macedonia	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Not applicable			
9745	Iraq	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
9730	Georgia	No	No	No	No	No	Not applicable			
9667	Dominica	No	No	No	No	No	Not applicable			
9586	Türkiye	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable			
9426	Namibia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	CBD UNFCCC			
9388	Lebanon	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable			
9293	Mali	No	No	No	No	No	UNFCCC CW (BRS?)			
9239	Indonesia	No	No	No	No	No	CBD UNFCCC			

7.4. Annex 4 - Review Matrix for In-depth Analysis of 10 LDN Projects

Learning questions	Phase 2 approach	Codes for in-depth document review	Sample of key informant interview questions
Q1a: How do countries apply the LDN concept in GEF projects?	**Phase 2:** This phase will help clarify pending questions from the portfolio review. It will be answered through a combination of a detailed review of the project documents for those projects fully designed, as well as field visits/key informant interviews.	Land tenure considerations Working across scales Traditional knowledge and practices Balanced system considerations Governance (for example, including « vulnerable », « collective access », « resource rights », « customary rights », « free, prior and informed consent », « indigenous peoples », « local communities », « resettlement », and « grievance redress mechanism ». Scale up Capacity development Innovative finance Baseline Preliminary assessment	What are the main challenges to the effective integration of land tenure dimensions in project designs? Was the planning and monitoring of indicators at multiple scale (spatial and/or temporal) integrated in project design? Indicators for assessing and monitoring coherence between regulations (formal and voluntary) across spatial scales will be included. Have traditional knowledge and practices been integrated in project design? How? If not, why not? Have the gains and losses to achieve a balanced system been taken into account in the project design? And indirect, spillover or leakage effects? If not, why not? What are the specific project activities that address the three response types of LDN: avoid, reduce, and reverse? What are the main challenges to promote responsible and inclusive governance? What are the main challenges to promote the scale out and up of what works? What are the key challenges to enhance (sub) national ownership and capacities? What are the key challenges to leverage innovative finance? What are main challenges of determine the baseline of the project? What are key challenges of implement preliminary assessments?

Learning questions	Phase 2 approach	Codes for in-depth document review	Sample of key informant interview questions
Q1b: How useful are the existing LDN guidelines and checklists?	**Phase 2:** The question on usefulness will be further answered through key informant interviews in Phase 2 of the assignment. Any particular section for improvement? Checklists: A) LDN fundamental, B) multiple benefits, C) governance, D) scale up, E) national ownership, F) finance Guidelines: A) Vision, B) Baseline, C) Mechanism, D) Achieving Neutrality, E) Monitoring	N/A	Is the concept of LDN well-understood and considered useful in guiding project design, implementation, and monitoring? Are you aware of the LDN guidelines and checklists? Were these used in project design? If not, why not? Were there any challenges in the use of the guidelines and checklists? If so, what were they? Are there any changes you would propose to improve the usefulness of the guidelines and checklists?
Q2: Are the GEF projects designed to support mainstreaming of the LDN concept into national policy and regulatory frameworks?	**Phase 2:** This will be answered through a combination of a detailed review of the projects' logical frameworks and results frameworks for those projects fully designed, as well as field visits/key informant interviews	Gaps/barriers relating to national policy/regulatory framework and LDN mainstreaming Proposed integration of LDN concept in national policies through revisions/ amendments/ of existing policies Support for the development of new policies mainstreaming LDN Proposed revisions to national regulatory frameworks to consider LDN Etc.	What are the current gaps in policy/regulatory frameworks regarding LDN? Are those gaps proposed to be filled through the project? How are the gaps proposed to be filled? Are there any unaddressed challenges/barriers to the mainstreaming of LDN into national policy and regulatory frameworks? What are key lessons learned and best practices to mainstream the LDN concept into national policy and regulatory frameworks so far?

Learning questions	Phase 2 approach	Codes for in-depth document review	Sample of key informant interview questions
Q3: How are projects planning to monitor LDN interventions?	**Phase 2:** In-depth review of the 10 projects for phase 2 will support answering this question. Key informant interviews will contribute to refining the information obtained from project documents.	Integration into existing national systems Development of new monitoring systems Project-level monitoring only Etc.	Has LDN monitoring been fully integrated in project design? Are there current systems at national level that could be leveraged to help monitor LDN interventions (e.g., climate MRV system)? Were those considered during project design? If not, why not? What are the characteristics of the monitoring system being proposed by the project? Do these characteristics include monitoring for gains and losses of land-based natural capital? What challenges is the project facing in the implementation of LDN monitoring systems? What are key lessons learned and best practices to monitor LDN interventions so far?
Q4a: Is the LDN framework used to promote policy coherence at national levels?	**Phase 2:** a more in-depth review of the 10 projects will be conducted and complemented by key informant interviews to provide more information on the aspect of policy coherence at national level. Overall, this learning question goes to complement the rapid portfolio assessment under the "Synergy" component.	Project supports cross-sectoral processes to policy revisions Project supports multi-stakeholder processes Project supports multi-level coordination mechanisms	Do you use the LDN framework to promote policy coherence at national level during project design and/or implementation? If not, why not? Do you use the LDN framework during project design and/or implementation to link to other convention agenda (NAP, NAPA, NDC, NBSAP, etc) for multiple benefits? If not, why not? Were there any challenges in the use of LDN framework to promote policy coherence at national levels and linkages with other convention agenda? If so, what were they? What are key lessons learned and best practices to promote policy coherence at national level so far?

Learning questions	Phase 2 approach	Codes for in-depth document review	Sample of key informant interview questions
Q5a. How do LDN projects address gender equality and women's empowerment?	**Phase 2:** In-depth review of the 10 projects through both in-depth documentation review (in particular, the project logframe, results framework; Gender section; and Gender Action Plan); and key informant interviews in-country. Project safeguards/ gender experts should be systematically engaged if present.	Gender tags: vi. Closing gender gaps in access to and control over resources; vii. Improving women's participation and decision making; viii. Contributing to social and economic benefits or services for women. Additional potential codes: – Women as agents of change – Gender indicators	Did you integrate gender perspectives in the project design? e.g., aligning project goals to gender equality priorities in national plans and strategies, conducting gender and social mapping and analysis, reaching out to stakeholders ensuring gender-balanced representation, setting up a gender responsive results framework or logframe, etc. Is so, how? Has the issue of closing gender gaps in access to and control over resources been addressed in the project design? If so, how? If not, why not? Were there any challenges in integrating gender perspectives in the project design/implementation? If so, what were they? What are key lessons learned and best practices to mainstream gender in the project so far?
Q5b. How do LDN projects address private sector engagement?	**Phase 2:** In-depth review of the 10 projects for phase 2 will support answering this question, including Section 4 of the CEO Endorsement on Private Sector Engagement.	Private sector consulted only Private sector as a project beneficiary Private sector as an executing partner Private sector as co-financing Types of private sector actors engaged through the project (e.g. Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME) vs large corporations)	Was the private sector engaged in the early stages of the project, such as concept stage or design stage? How did you integrate private sector in the project design? If it was not included, why not? Who are the private sector actors engaged in the project, and in what roles? What are the challenges in engaging the PS during implementation? Have new PS partners been identified and engaged since start of implementation? How are private sector actors contributing to the achievement of the project objectives? (e.g., support long-term financial sustainability; participate in certification schemes through landscape/jurisdictional approaches, etc.) What are key lessons learned and best practices to engage with private sector so far?

Learning questions	Phase 2 approach	Codes for in-depth document review	Sample of key informant interview questions
Q5c. How do LDN projects address drought?	**Phase 2:** In-depth review of the 10 projects for phase 2 will support answering this question.	TBD – This may, for instance, consider outcomes from UNCCD COP 15 as viewed through the lens of drought[31] Potential codes: Support for national drought plan; Early warning Proactive drought management Etc.	Did you address drought issues in the project design? Is so, how? If not, why? Were there any challenges in integrating drought issues in the project, including for implementation? If so, what were they? What are key lessons learned and best practices to address drought in the project so far?
Q6: What are some of the preliminary lessons and best practices of LDN as a framework for advancing systems transformation in policy coherence, multi-stakeholder dialogues, and innovation and learning?	**Phase 2:** In-depth review of the 10 projects for phase 2 will support answering this question, with particular attention to MTRs, PIRs, monitoring reports, and KIIs.	Good practices Lessons learned	If you can think of 2-3 best practices of LDN as a framework for project design, what would they be? If you can think of 2-3 key lessons learned from the implementation of the LDN framework in project designs, what would they be?

31 UNCCD. 2022. "UNCCD COP15 through the lens of drought: highlights, outcomes and the way forward."

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a multilateral family of funds dedicated to confronting biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution, and supporting land and ocean health. Its financing enables developing countries to address complex challenges and work towards international environmental goals. The partnership includes 186 member governments as well as civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth, with a focus on integration and inclusivity. Over the past three decades, the GEF has provided more than $25 billion in financing and mobilized $145 billion for country-driven priority projects. The family of funds includes the Global Environment Facility Trust Fund, Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF), Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF), Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund (NPIF), and Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency Trust Fund (CBIT).

MORE INFORMATION

GEF Secretariat
1818 H Street, NW, Mail Stop N8-800
Washington, DC 20433 USA
TEL: (202) 473–0508 **FAX:** (202) 522–3240/3245
EMAIL: secretariat@thegef.org

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