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Global Environment Facility

Roundtable keynote Introduction

By

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Partnerships and Institutions for
Combating Desertification, Land Degradation and
Drought – the path to improvement

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Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, it is an honor to be with you here now. Hopefully our discussion today will be the spark that ignites meaningful action. With this in mind I want to emphasize three key points.

First, we need to recognize that the “old” way we tackled development challenge has failed. We need a smarter, holistic approach. When we talk of poverty or food insecurity more often than not these problems are intertwined with global environmental challenges such as climate change and land degradation.

The bottom line is that international institutions and donor countries must take into account social, ecological, and environmental realities when addressing the needs of developing countries. Projects and programs that aim to reduce hunger will be more effective in the long run if they also are designed to ensure sustainable management of land and water resources.

Second, partnerships should be meaningful collaborations.— Partners, whether they come from the public sector, business, or civil society must bring to the table their best collaborative advantage; they also must recognize the strength of others to leverage the most impact. Partnership across sectors and scales will in turn foster sustainable solutions; isolation

guarantees inefficiency. This is a simple formula that underpins the Millennium Development Goals, which as you know call for global partnerships to support development.

The GEF as a financing mechanism has been a pioneer in this respect: we respond primarily to country demands but we do this through a unique partnership between international institutions, nongovernment organizations and the private sector. Our network of agencies ensures that each partner brings to the table a complementary set of competencies and this has allowed us to generate unprecedented levels of cofinancing – averaging levels of 1:4 over the past 15 years. It's a track record I am proud of.

We have for example spent \$500 million for 88 projects and programs supporting sustainable land management; we think this is a cost-effective approach to combat land degradation, and desertification and deforestation in particular. More than \$3 billion was leveraged in cofinancing. These interventions are still in fact yielding global environmental benefits; they help protect agricultural and production landscapes while simultaneously improving the livelihood base of millions of rural people.

Now the third point I want to make is that partnerships must be guided by principles that foster ownership and accountability at all levels –

International agreements such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Rome Declaration Aid Harmonization and Alignment are fundamental to providing predictable aid, aligning with country systems and harmonizing procedures. These efforts must be complemented by platforms at the national or regional level that facilitate dialogue among partners. National Dialogue Initiatives and Country Support Programs are fundamental aspects of GEF relations with countries, and spur stakeholder engagement at global environmental conventions.

Global Challenges and the GEF Partnership

For nearly two decades, we have worked together and collectively under guidance of the conventions, to tackle the biggest environmental challenges of our generation – climate change, loss of biodiversity, deterioration of international water resources, land degradation, ozone layer depletion, and persistent organic pollutants. Together we have achieved a lot, but there is still a lot of work to do.

The climate change problem is now well articulated, and has finally caught the attention of decision-makers at all levels. Yet, in its wake there are other complex interacting drivers impacting natural systems – in particular biodiversity, forests, land, and water.

We are witnessing a progressive deterioration in ecosystem goods and services spurred by growing human demands for food, fresh water, timber, fiber and fuel that is further aggravated by climate change. For example, land degradation already affects about 2.6 billion people across more than 100 countries. Degraded land is costly to reclaim: for example, the financial loss from land degradation in Latin America and the Caribbean is estimated to be more than 27 billion dollars annually.

So to me it is very clear that fighting desertification, land degradation, and drought must be done in the context of sustainable development. One cannot happen without the other. It is also clear that in the long haul protecting and sustainably managing natural capital is not only a very worthwhile economic investment, but a vital tool to free future generations from crushing poverty. Let me briefly talk about two examples the GEF

partners have been using to shift the paradigm for sustainable land management.

First: Country Partnership Programs

As I said at the beginning GEF invests in projects and programs that aim to fight land degradation and desertification in a holistic way. GEF projects look to integrate sustainable land management into national development priorities; we mainstream across sectors and in the process look to strengthen human, technical, and institutional capacities. This in turn can create needed policy and regulatory reforms including innovative sustainable land management practices. This approach was the basis for the GEF Country Partnership Programs (CPPs) as platforms to leverage support for comprehensive Sustainable Land Management (SLM) initiatives at the national level.

Second: Programmatic Approaches

Building on the Country Partnership Programs, the GEF has expanded its catalytic role in combating land degradation globally through Programmatic Approaches. Programmatic approaches are designed to secure larger scale

and sustained impact on the global environment through integrating global environmental objectives into national or regional strategies and plans, using partnerships based on the comparative advantages of involved partners. Programmatic approaches in GEF-4 included the Strategic Investment Program on Sustainable Land Management in Sub-Saharan Africa (SIP/TerrAfrica), the Sustainable Land and Ecosystem Management Program in India (SLEM), and the Program on Integrated Nature Resources Management in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENARID).

Let me close by talking a bit about TerrAfrica and how it can be instructive as we move forward.

Land degradation is a global problem, but nowhere is its effects more serious than the African continent where 67% of the land surface is affected, including areas currently under agricultural production. Furthermore, with nearly 70% of the continent's population living in rural areas which are tied to the land for both income and shelter, the consequences of degradation have far reaching economic and social impacts. The magnitude and extent of land degradation requires holistic and robust strategies to transform piece-meal interventions into large-scale

models to ensure long-term sustainability. TerrAfrica is an important tool toward meeting this long-term goal. We can improve agricultural productivity and do it in a way that generates global environmental benefits, most notably resilience to climate change. Ladies and Gentlemen: I think there can be no dispute that climate change is here to stay. And with this in mind there are compelling moral and economic reasons why we need to act now to give the world's most vulnerable the tools they need to adjust to melting glaciers, higher seas and drier lands. As the international community increasingly focuses on adaptation, building a cooperative and sustainable framework to combat land degradation is within our reach. Hopefully the discussions today will move beyond platitudes into concrete steps that keep us on a path that will deliver meaningful results.

Thank you