

Highlights Report
SDG 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality Day
11 September 2017
Ordos, China

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Day at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Conference of the Parties (COP) 13 in Ordos, China began in the afternoon at the Rio Conventions Pavilion. A welcome address was given by the moderator, Mr. Pushpam Kumar, Senior Economic Advisor of UN Environment Programme (UNEP). He introduced the panelists of the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) and LDN in Asia panel discussion, which was organized by UNEP. Kumar began by saying “this panel is here to share with you their findings of their policies and their experiences.” He stressed, “Every goal is directly or indirectly related to land resources”.



Mark Schauer, Coordinator of the ELD initiative, GIZ explained that the ELD Initiative is a global initiative

Mark Schauer, Coordinator of the ELD initiative, (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) GIZ, Government of Germany, explained the ELD Initiative is a global initiative that was incepted in 2012. The ELD Initiative’s purpose is to help create scientific innovations that can help decision makers. He said the ELD “analyzes the economic benefits derived from sustainable land management practices”. Schauer expressed excitement that

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ELD is planning to work in five countries in Africa. He stressed that “ELD should move from global perspective to implementation of initiative...that’s the challenge”.

Mesfin Tilahu, Associate Professor of Economics at Mekelle University in Ethiopia, discussed the benefit analysis of ELD saying, “the study aims to assess the economics of LDN in Asian regions and to design response options for sustainable land management (SLM).” He said they have found that “land degradation leads to declining natural capital and reduced productivity”. The policy implications of this finding directly impact poverty reduction and food security. The study of discussion is an important contribution SDG 15.3, as it provides methods of integrating the value of soil in the nation’s social accounting matrix.

The Vice Minister of the Ministry of Commerce in the People's Republic of China, Mr. Wang Guosheng, was also a member of the panel. He said “China has systems and indicators to assess the economic losses of land degradation” and “land degradation is very important to our objectives to reach SDG 15.3”. He offered that China can provide methods of combating land degradation via scientific approaches at low cost. Wang continued by explaining that China conducts a national level assessment every five years, as the economics of land degradation are based on monitoring and assessment.

Anne Juepner of UN Development Programme (UNDP) contributed that “We still have one billion people in extreme poverty...the demand of food, energy, and water keep increasing, it’s a huge challenge for all of us”. She highlighted that this is a global concern both on the international and local level. Juepner stressed that UNDP is very happy to be an active partner with UNCCD on combating land degradation and feels that policy and decision makers should increase public awareness on land ecosystems. The UNDP is looking forward to its initiative to support countries on evaluating land ecosystems, as it aims to identify strategic opportunities linking the national LDN targets. On a final note, she added, “We need to re-emphasize that UNDP is ready to support the initiatives and to assure countries take action.”

The second session of the day was organized by the European Commission Directorate General for Environment (EC DG ENV). The panel discussion centered on meeting the challenges of achieving LDN in Europe was opened by Mr. Siim Kiisler, Minister of the Environment of Estonia and EU Council President. It was agreed that land degradation in the European Union (EU) is variable from one region to the other and aggravated by climate change. The event presented an overview of activities striving to achieve LDN at EU and Member State level. The session offered an opportunity for European countries addressing LDN to discuss different approaches. The event also showed how measures at EU level can complement and support those taken at national level. Kiisler suggested there are no quick

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solutions, but we have a common goal: Improve land use and management. He stressed that “Policy coherence is the key.”

Mr. Daniel Calleja Crespo, Director General DG Environment, European Commission contributed that land degradation is not only a problem in other parts of world but that, “in Europe, we are also facing this problem.” “He went on to explain that a large area of southern Europe is desertified and highlighted, “When the soils are healthy, we are healthy.” Examples of actions at member states level in Estonia were presented briefly by Taimar Ala, past member of Estonia’s Ministry of Environment. He discussed the country’s concerns about achieving SDG 15.3 within the timeframe of months or years. Ala said “the easy solution is to close mines”.



Josiane Masson of EC DG ENV and ITPS describes EU policy context and activities to tackle land degradation at EU level

Dr. Luca Montanarella Joint Research Centre and Chair of the International Technical Panel on Soil (ITPS) discussed the state of soil and land in the EU. He said the EU is losing its most productive soil every year, and that a major issue is contamination. Ms. Josiane Masson of EC DG ENV and ITPS went into detail in her overview of the EU policy context and activities to tackle land degradation at EU level. She said “we need to focus on raising awareness and

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knowledge base” while “defining policy priorities based on the outcomes of the inventory of soil policy instrument and gap analysis”. She concluded by saying “Linking land degradation and soil with EU political priorities is important for jobs and investment”.

Walter Engelberg, GIZ also discussed actions being taken in Germany to slow land degradation. In 2015 a new program for food security began which utilizes government funding. Engelberg also explained that development and cooperation is the focal point of the UNCCD and that “between the ministers of environment of Europe, the soil health cooperation is very close”. He went on to discuss that Germany does not yet have an indicator addressing the quality and health of soils, but that the country already has various targets and mechanisms relevant for LDN policies.

Maura Centritto, Italian Trees and Timber Institute (CNR – IVALSIA) and Dr. Anna Luise, Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) discussed LDN actions in Italy. Together they explained that Italy uses its own resources and indicators, assessing land use changes at a regional level. From these assessments they now know that between 2000 and 2015, the degraded area in Italy was 7,276 km². Centritto and Luise confirmed that land degradation and desertification were issues included in Italy’s National Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation. Furthermore, the SDG Target 15.3 is included in the target that Italy is willing to adopt in the Strategy for Sustainable Developments.

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Pictures from SDG 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality Day



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