



## **Concept Note**

### **Land Degradation Neutrality**

### **Network for Certification and conservation of forests**

## Introduction

Land is the most important natural resource and is the foundation for human civilization and development. It provides food, fibre and support other services essential for our life. Land resource being finite, pressure on it is growing as population grows with rising levels of consumption as the affluence increases. Due to increased competition for land resource, the overall health and productivity of the land is declining.

Land degradation are observed to have accelerated during recent decades. .Thus it is critical to find effective measures to address land degradation which will have co-benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation and also biodiversity conservation, in addition to food security and sustainable development. To address the land degradation specifically in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas of the world United Nations Convention for Combating Desertification (UNCCD) was established in 1994.

## Land Degradation Neutrality

In October 2015, UNCCD country Parties reached a breakthrough agreement on a new paradigm called the land degradation neutrality (LDN) for managing land degradation. LDN is defined as “a 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”. It aims to maintain the land resource base so that it can continue to supply ecosystem services, improve productivity in order to enhance food security, seek synergy with other environmental objectives and enhance resilience of the communities that depend on land.

As the dynamics of land, climate and biodiversity are intimately connected, the UNCCD collaborates closely with the other two Rio Conventions; the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to meet these complex challenges with an integrated approach and the best possible use of natural resources. LDN targets and associated measures contribute to and depend on the implementation of national climate plans and vice versa.

## Bonn Challenge

A Global effort to restore deforested and degraded land at landscape level was launched by the leaders of the world in 2011 at Bonn on the initiative of IUCN and Germany as Bonn Challenge which was later endorsed by UN Climate Summit in 2014 by New York Declaration on Forests. At the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (CoP) 2015 in Paris, the government of India made a Bonn Challenge pledge to bring 13 million hectares of degraded land into restoration by 2020 and an additional 8 million hectares by 2030. As per an assessment done by IUCN with the support Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in 2018 “Bonn Challenge and India: Progress on restoration efforts across states and landscapes report”, India has brought an area

of 9.8 million hectares under restoration since 2011(until 2016-17) meaning that work to restore these landscapes is already underway. Of the 9.8 million hectares, 94.4% was contributed by government agencies, while the surveyed NGOs and private companies contributed 3.6% and 2% respectively

LDN targets and associated measures contribute to and depend on the implementation of national climate plans and vice versa. Such synergies should be taken into account when developing national plans for LDN and revising and updating the INDCs under the Paris Agreement.

## **The Indian Situation**

It is estimated that about 30% of the total geographical area of India is affected by land degradation. India with 2.5% of the global land area, supports world's 18% of human and 20% of livestock population thus faces a huge pressure on land resource and which expected to increase further. India is a signatory to the UNCCD.

The 14<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (COP14) was hosted by India during September 2019 at Greater Noida, Delhi. The conference was addressed by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India where he reiterated India's commitment to the global land agenda and raised India's ambition to restore land degradation status from 21 Million Hectares to 26 Million Hectares by 2030.

COP14 aimed to help countries achieve Land Degradation Neutrality by delivering tools and resources that are fit for the purpose. Tools that are built on accurate and reliable science and data, participatory processes and compromise and benefits to everyone. Countries can withstand future environmental challenges better by optimizing land management and massively scaling up sustainable practices and the restoration of degraded land.

NCCF had organized a side event (panel discussion) "Certification of Natural Resources to Combat Desertification and Restoring Landscapes" during COP14 of UNCCD. The side event focused on certification of natural resources enhancing the sustainability of forests, agroforests, urban forests and NWFPs, thereby controlling land degradation, helping in combating desertification and achieving ultimate goal of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). It was one of the major recommendations of the side event to develop Certification Standard for Land Degradation Neutrality.

## **Contribution of Certification in Land Restoration**

Certification of natural resources enhance the sustainability of forests, agroforests, urban forests and NWFPs, thereby controlling land degradation and helping in combating desertification and achieving ultimate goal of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).

Forest Certification is a voluntary, non-regulatory and facilitative tool for continuous improvement towards sustainable forest management, including forest monitoring, tracing and labelling of timber and non-timber forest products. This adds value to findings of periodic monitoring which help forest department and other agencies to keep check on all desired outcomes from management activities. Certified forests are managed using environmentally safe techniques which includes - use of permissible pesticides, safe collection and disposal of toxic waste, controlling off site regeneration of exotic species, minimising negative impact on soil and water resources, conservation measures to conserve and preserve ecosystem services and identification and management of high conservation values.

In India, about 85% of industrial wood requirement is met from trees grown outside forests. TOF remains an invisible resource to industry and units using products from TOF land use. Certification amplifies market acceptability, premium price and export of forest and tree products. It safeguards social attributes by ensuring social equity and livelihood opportunities to locals, safety and health of workers, respect for rights of tribal and local communities and consultations with stakeholders.

### **Need of Certification Standard for Land Degradation Neutrality**

Certification standard for Land Degradation Neutrality will be impactful in terms of promoting responsible management inputs for land restoration. Forest certification systems have in-built specific Principles, Criteria and Indicators to reverse and arrest land degradation and check desertification. These include reduced impact of logging, land and soil erosion control measures, watershed conservation and fire protection related actions, etc that have to be taken compulsorily in order to be a certified forest. Soil protection measures include restriction on use of banned chemicals and pesticides. In fact, a major portion of forest certification is devoted toward achieving these objectives. Now with recognition of forests' role as vital eco system services provider, certification systems have incorporated these principles too in order to widen the former's contribution toward soil and land amelioration as these would become more and more relevant, and hence to be monetised, for overall protection of the land, water and soil.

Standard for LDN certification can be used to accelerate the transition towards sustainable agroforestry and encourage land restoration in degraded land. Convergence of the objectives of three conventions, UNCCD, UNCBD and UNFCCC through certification standard will have complimentary effect and will help arrest land degradation in a much more coordinated fashion. This will eventually serve the purpose of mitigating climate change and conserving biodiversity.

NCCF has already developed standards for Forest Management Certification, Trees outside Forests Certification and development of other standards is at advanced stage. So, lot of information is available in criteria and indicators. It is proposed to develop LDN standard out of the existing available information and for this purpose, a small group under the Chairmanship of Dr Devendra Pandey, Former member IFS, ex-DG, FSI, would be



constituted to look into various aspects of land degradation and to evolve a standard for land degradation neutrality.

The said standard will be field tested in identified project sites in different project sites falling under different dryland regions of India : Arid, Semi-Arid and Dry-Sub Humid regions, as specified by national bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning, Bangalore.

NCCF in its standards have incorporated above relevant principles along with those for carbon and biodiversity related issues, which is an improvement over other certification system. It would also be essential to include grass land, water bodies, mangroves, shola forests, savannahs and swamps too as new HCVs under the scope of Forest Certification so as to ensure that these important areas are also part of best management practices which form the core of forest certification, that has already emerged as a proven strategy to contribute significantly to restore land and sustain future.

### **About the Organisation**

Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is a not for profit organization established under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 to promote credible forest certification in India. It is an institutional mechanism to ensure collaborative and streamlined efforts to develop national standard for Forest Management Certification in India. NCCF was officially registered in January 2015.

NCCF is actively engaged in diverse conservation activities including, development of globally benchmarked and India specific sustainability certification standards for various constituents of our natural resource base, as its core working area. We have already developed certification standards for Forest Management and Trees outside Forests and are at an advance stage of development of standards for non-wood forest produce, protected areas and wetlands, quality planting material, ecotourism and biomass & biofuels, and envisage to develop more such sustainability standards in near future.