

IUCN Position

**United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
Fifteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15)
Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, 9th to 20th May 2022**

Summary of Key Messages

As UNCCD Parties continue to set and achieve their Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets, accelerate efforts to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity, implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achieve a nature-positive world by 2030, IUCN makes the following recommendations to the Parties:

Adopt Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)

- Endorse the NbS definition as agreed to by [IUCN Members](#) in 2016 and more recently, by the United Nations Environment Assembly ([UNEA5](#));
- Adopt and implement NbS as the preferred option for national LDN target achievement;
- Strengthen enabling policies to enhance public and private sectors investment in LDN and land restoration.

Increase and maintain action and commitment for rangeland restoration

- Support the initiation of a process towards adoption of a decision at UNCCD COP16 focused on rangelands aimed at enhancing policies, action and investment in rangeland restoration;
- Enhance ambition for rangeland restoration within national LDN target-setting;
- Prioritize reinforcing institutional capacities in order to generate evidence of the cost of rangeland degradation to society and provide sustainable and innovative investment options for rangeland restoration;
- Increase national capacities to strengthen rangelands' governance and to implement mechanisms that reinforce land tenure and land rights for pastoralists and other rangeland communities;
- Recognize the contribution of grasslands and rangelands to biodiversity conservation and connectivity in the production landscapes.

Adopt land health and ecosystem-based approaches in national drought-risk frameworks and strategies

- Recognise the role of land health in reducing drought providing benefits for society at large. Healthy land maintains and improves hydrological flows, enables ground water recharge and enhances regional macroclimates and reduces drought;
- Invest in land restoration as a NbS approach to tackle drought and generate co-benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation, socioeconomic development, food and water security.

Engage Indigenous People Organisations (IPOs), women's organizations, the Private Sector and Civil Society organisations (CSOs) in LDN achievement

- Secure and increase the participation and engagement of Indigenous People Organisations, women's organizations, the private sector and civil society organisations in meetings processes of the UNCCD, using relevant tools and mechanisms such as the business engagement strategy to achieve LDN;

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- Commit to create innovative partnerships with public and private actors, civil society and the land users to scale up land restoration.

Strengthen and operationalize synergies with the other Rio Conventions and other relevant agreements and processes

- Prioritise land restoration as a way to achieve the goals of all 3 Rio Conventions, and develop monitoring and reporting mechanisms that effectively and practically operationalize synergies across them;
- As national efforts continue to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, seize the opportunity of the ongoing negotiations towards the adoption of a Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, to further emphasize and demonstrate the role of 'managed ecosystems' in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development and the need for the application of human rights and gender responsive approaches;
- Strengthen institutional mechanisms for cross-sectoral management of the diverse rangelands resources across the relevant sectors, including environment, agriculture, forest and water;
- Promote LDN as the entry point to facilitate the establishment of the above-mentioned mechanisms and integrate them in policies and investments; and
- Rally around the Great Green Wall Initiative, ramping up collective work across governments, Civil Society Organisations and local communities towards achieving the vision of the GGW and ultimately, large-scale economic, social and biodiversity impact across the Sahel.

As UNCCD Parties continue to set and achieve their Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets, accelerate efforts to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity, implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achieve a nature-positive world by 2030, IUCN makes the following recommendations to the Parties:

Adopt Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)

The Nature-based Solutions (NbS) concept is based on the work that IUCN has been conducting over the past decades on Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR), Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA), Ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR), and Sustainable Land Management (SLM). IUCN recognises the role of these approaches to address global challenges, and strives to promote and increase the recognition, knowledge and understanding of the NbS concept among stakeholders, including Government partners, scientists, land users, conservationists, the private sector actors and donors.

IUCN's definition of NbS as adopted by its Members in 2016 refers to: ***“actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges (e.g. climate change, food and water security or natural disasters) effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits”***.¹

IUCN welcomes the recent approval of a *Resolution on Nature-based Solutions for Supporting Sustainable Development* by the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA5) which defines NbS, largely building on IUCN's definition, as: ***‘actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services and resilience and biodiversity benefits.’***

This multilaterally agreed definition provides the enabling environment to advance cooperation on and implementation of NbS at scale and is supported by the [IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions](#)TM developed in 2020

¹ [WCC 2016 Res 069 | IUCN Library System](#)

and which is about using conservation actions to not only meet biodiversity and ecosystems needs but also people's needs.

Based on the above, IUCN recommends Parties to **endorse the NbS definition and in doing so, strengthen the enabling environment for LDN implementation in accordance with the IUCN Global Standard for NbS**. The Global Standard for NbS supports a common language and framework to bring together partners and other key stakeholders – including local communities - and mainstreams NbS. The standard will ensure the quality and credibility of NbS and secure effectiveness to provide benefits to both human well-being and biodiversity.

IUCN further strongly recommends Parties to adopt NbS interventions as the preferred option for LDN achievement. This approach provides a holistic and balanced response and generates multiple benefits for people and nature, addresses SDGs and contributes to poverty reduction. As Parties apply NbS they need to understand and consider the different benefits, and trade-offs, of NbS interventions as there are frequently differences in when, where and for whom adaptation, social, environmental and economic benefits from NbS accrue.

Importantly, **IUCN urges Parties to strengthen enabling policies to enhance public and private sectors' investments in LDN and land restoration**. The integration of the use of NbS to achieve LDN in policies will enhance stronger partnership between the public and private sector to finance NbS and sustainable value chains that contribute to create a healthy environment for both people and nature.

Increase and maintain action and commitment for rangeland restoration

IUCN welcomes the substantial progress made by Parties to the UNCCD towards setting their LDN targets. We equally welcome progress in the process of developing and implementing gender-responsive transformative projects and programmes. As efforts continue to set and achieve targets, **IUCN calls on Parties' support for the initiation, during COP15, of a process towards adoption of a decision at the next COP (COP16) focused on rangelands aimed at enhancing policies, action and investment in rangeland restoration**.

The momentum towards a global action for rangeland restoration has advanced over the past three years, and is aligned with and contributes to the aims of existing commitments: at its 4th session in March 2019, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) adopted Resolution L17 on “Innovations in Sustainable Rangelands and Pastoralism”; the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration has been approved and provides an opportunity to draw attention to rangelands; the International Year for Rangelands and Pastoralists was recently agreed to for 2026 by the United Nations General Assembly; from 2020 to 2022, IUCN, WWF and UNCCD first interactive dialogue on rangeland restoration, and subsequent Regional Rangeland dialogues were strongly supported by Parties to the UNCCD; during the CRIC 19, in 2021, a number of those Parties reiterated the need for action on rangeland restoration, and the [IUCN Resolution on Protecting and restoring endangered grassland and savannah ecosystems](#).

Linked to this, **Parties need to enhance their ambition for rangeland and grassland restoration within their national LDN target setting.** This can be done through integrating (and subsequently implementing) specific targets aimed at improving the productivity of grasslands and rangelands.² Grasslands ecosystems support more than 2 billion people as well as essential ecosystem services including forage production, carbon storage, soil protection and biodiversity conservation³.

The proportion of rangelands on Earth emphasizes the urgency to act. However, IUCN is deeply concerned that international commitments to restoration and conservation pay minimal attention to rangelands and grasslands. Given the importance of rangeland restoration to achieve LDN, and because rangelands continue to experience high levels of degradation, there is a risk to conflict with LDN principles if rangelands continue to be neglected.

It is thus important that **Parties prioritize the strengthening of institutional capacities in order to generate evidence of the cost of rangeland degradation to society** and provide sustainable and innovative investment options for rangeland restoration.

² Grasslands are defined as ‘lands dominated by native grasses, herbaceous plants and relatively few trees with shrubs usually less than 10 percent’ (White, 1983).

Parties are equally encouraged to increase their national capacities to reinforce rangelands’ governance and to implement mechanisms that strengthen land tenure and land rights for pastoralists and other rangeland communities.

IUCN emphasizes that rangelands are home to livestock keeping people, known as pastoralists - often referred to as herders, shepherds, ranchers, and by other names, depending on the countries. They play a crucial role in maintaining rangeland ecosystems. **Parties should increase concerted action and global collaboration for rangeland restoration between various stakeholders, including governments, private investors, scientists and rangeland users that includes pastoralists.** Concerted action can be increased through the establishment of effective land governance mechanisms that in turn support cross-sectoral and multi-actor dialogue, as well as inclusive decision-making mechanisms over land management. Such mechanisms include the establishment and strengthening of traditional sustainable land management approaches that help local communities apply innovative ecosystem-based approaches to restoration and build their resilience to global challenges in targeted landscapes, ultimately leading to poverty reduction.

IUCN emphasizes that pastoralists have been effectively managing grasslands for centuries and **calls on Parties to recognize the contribution of grasslands and rangelands to biodiversity conservation and connectivity in the production landscape.**

Adopt land health and ecosystem-based approaches in national drought-risk frameworks and strategies

Drought events continue to affect economies and millions of people across the globe as they lead to food insecurity and crisis, particularly among the poor, and particularly in dryland areas. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of disasters has considerably increased in frequency and intensity.

Climate conditions, including the greater frequency of hot events may lead to an increase in the frequency of droughts with impacts on ecosystems and people. However, disasters and

³ Leisher et al. 2012, NatureServe 2010.

natural hazards are also triggered by ecosystem and land degradation.

Nature should be used as a response to invest in drought, which will leverage multiple benefits. **Parties need to recognize the role of land health in reducing drought and drought impacts.** Healthy land maintains and improves hydrological flows, enables ground water recharge and enhances regional macroclimates that otherwise can cause drought. **IUCN encourages Parties to invest in land restoration as a NbS approach to tackle drought** and generate co-benefits including climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation, social and economic development and food and water security. This should include strengthening enabling policies for public and private sectors to socially and environmentally invest in ecosystem-based approaches to drought; develop innovative investments to strengthen value chains for drought resilience.

Engage Indigenous People Organisations (IPOs), Women's organisations, the Private Sector and Civil Society organisations (CSOs) in LDN achievement

IUCN encourages Parties and other relevant stakeholders to secure and increase the participation and involvement of Indigenous People Organisations, Women's organisations, the private sector and Civil Society Organisations in meetings and processes of the UNCCD, using relevant tools and mechanisms such as the business engagement strategy to achieve LDN (Agenda item 7), and increase the interest of private sectors land restoration. In effect, private sector actors have not been involved and engaged in land restoration in dryland areas for many reasons, including perceived risks in investing in those regions or failure to see restoration as something that adds business value along the entire value chain.

UNCCD Parties have started to develop and implement transformative projects to achieve their LDN targets that will not only contribute to the SDGs and the UNCCD, but also to other key global commitments such as those under the other two Rio Conventions - CBD and UNFCCC, the Bonn Challenge, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. However, many actors and Civil society Organisations and groups have expressed concern about the lack of a multi-actor approach to LDN implementation. Achieving LDN requires that Civil Society Organisations mobilization is increased,

including the mobilization of community-based stakeholders. The funding will further be reliable and operational if we mobilize people, especially actors from the ground. It is clear that Civil Society Organisations have the capacity to mobilize such actors. **IUCN therefore urges Parties to commit to strengthen the role of CSOs and IPOs in achieving LDN, and to create innovative partnerships with public and private actors, civil society at large including land users to scale up land restoration.** This can be done through the development and implementation of joint action plans for example. Indigenous peoples and local community's knowledge must be valued and collaboration with local organizations – including women and youth – should be strengthened. IUCN is of the view that this will help to further tackle the interconnected challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change and land degradation.

In this respect, IUCN is very supportive of the *Great Green Wall (GGW) for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative*; the GGW promises a compelling solution to the many urgent threats not only facing the African Continent, but the global community as a whole – notably climate change, drought, famine, conflict and migration. Progress towards the goals of the GGW is also progress towards commitments to LDN and to forest landscape restoration under the Africa 100 initiative of the Bonn Challenge. Delivering these ambitious targets depends on appropriate investment from private and public actors that support local land users to restore and sustainably manage their land while building resilient livelihoods and rural economies.

IUCN calls on Parties to rally around the GGW, ramping up collective work across governments, Civil Society Organisations and local communities, and in particular calls on African leaders, to strengthen efforts towards achieving the vision of the GGW and ultimately, large-scale economic, social and biodiversity impact across the Sahel.

Strengthen and operationalize synergies with the other Rio Conventions and other relevant agreements and processes

LDN implementation is the entry point to address several societal challenges and can generate multiple benefits that go beyond the restoration of hectares of land. By connecting and creating synergies between the different related sectors on water, agriculture, conservation of nature/environment, LDN has the potential to address climate change mitigation and

adaptation as well as biodiversity conservation including through integrated approaches to addressing land health (Agenda item 3). Importantly, application of human rights and gender responsive approaches in this respect is essential. IUCN stands ready to continue supporting Parties in developing and strengthening their Gender Action Plans.

In this respect, **IUCN recommends Parties to prioritize land restoration as a way to achieve the goals of all three Rio Conventions, and develop monitoring and reporting mechanisms to effectively and practically operationalize synergies across them.**

For example, outcomes from restoration interventions that address the different but inter-related goals of the Conventions should be clearly recognized and embedded in country reports as appropriate and then accounted for in global progress reports.

Finally, as national efforts continue to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Parties should also seize the opportunity of the ongoing negotiation towards the adoption of a Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to further emphasize and demonstrate the role of ‘managed ecosystems’ in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. In fact, most grasslands and other production landscapes like farmlands are found in dryland areas, which harbour key features, including unique habitats, and exceptional biodiversity values with great potential to generate conservation outcomes. It is important that as new Goals and Targets under the Post-2020 framework are set, these biodiversity values are fully taken into consideration.