Remarks
by

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Sustainable Development Goal/Target on Land Degradation and Land Degradation Neutrality Fund: Implications for the LLDCs

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Ministers,
Ambassador Mulenga,
Mr. Moderator,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentleman,

Let me at the outset express our appreciation for the excellent collaboration between UNCCD and OHRLLS, as reflected in the organising of the side event and the publication which will be launched at this event entitled “The Impact of Climate Change, Desertification and Land Degradation on the Development Prospects of Landlocked Developing Countries’.

As we all know, and Mr. Acharya recalled it, most of the world’s poor, hungry and malnourished reside in the land locked developing countries. All LLDCs are heavily dependent on a fragile natural base – i.e. land -for their development. All the LLDCs are primarily producers of agricultural products. At the same time they are among the worst affected by land degradation and desertification. Indeed the major impediments to sustainable development in LLDCs remains extreme poverty land degradation, desertification and drought. Those challenges corrode the three pillars of sustainable development of LLDCs.

The UNCCD has a close link to LLDCs. All 31 countries are affected by DLDD. More than 50% of agricultural land is moderately to severely degraded DLDD.
Land degradation not only entrenches people in poverty, it jeopardizes food security, increases water stress locally and regionally and triggers biodiversity loss and deforestation. DLDD negatively impacted the achievement of MDGs.

Land locked developing countries are also among those most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. As the report entitled “The Impact of Climate Change, Desertification and Land Degradation on the Development Prospects of Landlocked Developing Countries” points out, many LLDCs are located in dryland regions, where the impacts of climate change, desertification and land degradation are more pronounced. Indeed it is in drylands – where the soils are very fragile, vegetation is sparse and the climate is particularly unforgiving that desertification and land degradation wreaks havoc, leading to sharp declines in agricultural productivity- the mainstay of many LLDC economies.

Climate change is further exacerbating this situation with many regions facing more frequent and prolonged droughts or unseasonal rainfalls and flooding, leading to loss of fertile topsoil through erosion. It would be in the interest of LLDCs to advocate for a land based approach to adaptation, as we look ahead to the Paris Climate Change COP. Such an approach would yield multiple benefits including enhanced food security, alleviation of water stress and help build the resilience of LLDCs to climatic shocks.

Good news for LLDCs

At Rio plus 20, world leaders acknowledged that land degradation and desertification posed serious challenges for the sustainable development of developing countries particularly LLDCs and also committed to strive to achieve a Land Degradation Neutral world.

World leaders gathered recently at the UN Sustainable development Summit 2015 adopted a far reaching agenda for the coming decades and committed to achieving the sustainable development target of land degradation neutrality by 2030. This is especially crucial for land locked developing countries which depend on the land, their natural capital. UNCCD can assist land locked developing countries in achieving land degradation neutrality by providing the necessary tools and indicators to monitor progress.

**Why achieving land degradation neutrality is beneficial for LLDCs?**

**Implications for the UNCCD**

For the first time since its existence, Parties to the UNCCD have now a global target to guide the implementation of the Convention. The Convention has now entered the realm of measurability. In many countries also, achieving land degradation neutrality will require a paradigm shift in land stewardship: from “degrade-abandon-migrate” to “protect-sustain-restore”. This means cooperation among various sectors and national sustainable development plans that embrace complementary management options including:

(a) Adopting sustainable land management policies and practices in order to minimize current, and avoid future land degradation and
(b) Rehabilitating degraded lands and abandoned production lands as well as restoring
degraded natural and semi-natural ecosystems that provide vital benefit to people and
working landscapes.

As we embark on the SDG15 and target 15.3 pathways, LLDCs will constitute a test case. It is
a category of countries where the implementation of LDN will bear a quick impact and show
quick results. Most of degraded lands in LLDCs countries bear a strong potential for
rehabilitation. Today, 2 billion hectares of land are degraded. 500 million are agricultural
land that we have abandoned. Most of those lands are in LLDCs. This is why LLDCs should
receive a priority in our efforts to rehabilitate degraded lands. If appropriate investments
are consented, I have no doubt that in 2030, LLDCs can be listed among those countries who
can achieve land degradation neutrality. Of course, those countries should pay priority to
DLDD issues.

Land degradation neutrality fund

The LDN Fund will promote the rehabilitation of a minimum of 12 million hectares of
degraded land per year, supporting sustainable productive uses of upgraded land by
providing adequate and long-term financing and technical assistance.
The Fund aims to:

- generate revenue streams from sustainable production/use of upgraded lands;
- contribute to the achievement of global and local food security by the year 2050;
- mitigate climate change by sequestering up to 20% of CO2 emissions by 2050;
- increase the resilience of vulnerable population, species and ecosystems to climate
  change.

To close my remarks, I wish to say that the battle to achieve a land degradation neutral
world will be won in LLDCs should those countries give it a priority and investments in
reclaiming degraded lands be made accordingly.

Thank you.