



Statement
by
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Chief of Office
on the occasion of the
UN- OHRLLS
Ambassadorial Retreat on the Midterm Review
of
Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs

New York, 8 May 2019



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Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

When LLDCs were identified as a special category of the international community requiring special assistance, this was triggered by the plight those countries were going through because of their situation in terms of access to international markets through transit countries. It is only recently that this trade-driven agenda was shifted to a more comprehensive agenda, this time, sustainable development driven. Climate change has since broadened challenges LLDCs face, notably desertification, land degradation and drought.

Indeed, the major impediments to sustainable development in LLDCs remains extreme poverty and land degradation and desertification.

Land locked developing countries are also among those most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. UNCCD had collaborated with OHRLLS some years ago on a study entitled “The Impact of Climate Change, Desertification and Land Degradation on the Development Prospects of Landlocked Developing Countries’. The study pointed out that 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.

Madame Moderator,

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda includes SDG 15.3 – a commitment to achieve land degradation neutrality by 2030. The objective of Land Degradation Neutrality is to prevent or avoid the degradation of healthy and productive lands through sustainable land management (SLM) and sustainable forestry management (SFM) practices, including agroforestry, sustainable agriculture and livestock practices, water management, and soil conservation, and where feasible, regenerate land that is already degraded.

LDN is especially crucial for land locked developing countries, which depend on the land, their natural capital. The UN General Assembly has recognized LDN as an accelerator and integrator for the SDGs and this is especially relevant for LLDCs because land restoration would yield multiple benefits from food and water security, gender empowerment, to providing livelihoods and addressing poverty.

The overall objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Agenda is “**Leave no one behind**”. Today, in LLDCS as in the rest of the world, the poorest, the hungriest, the unhealthiest, the regions where women and children are suffering the most, those regions have a map: that of desertification, land degradation and drought. But, we have good news. With the introduction of land degradation in the SDGs, with the adoption of SDG15 Target 15.3, the international community has committed to tackle land degradation which is plaguing LLDCs through achieving land degradation neutrality. As of today, UNCCD has assisted land locked developing countries in achieving land degradation neutrality by providing the necessary tools and indicators to monitor progress. All Many LLDCs

participated in the LDN target setting program (to which 121 countries had subscribed). Building on this, transformative projects are being developed and their implementation would be key for LLDCs to achieve land degradation neutrality.

This would require resources. In this respect, UNCCD has participated in creating the Land degradation neutrality fund (LDN Fund) accessed by LLDCs as soon as it enters into operational phase. The LDN Fund is an impact investment fund blending resources from the public, private and philanthropic sectors to support achieving LDN through sustainable land management and land restoration projects implemented by the private sector. In addition to restoring degraded lands, the Fund will generate revenues from sustainable use of natural resources, creating green job opportunities for local communities, increasing food and water security and sequestering CO₂. This can serve a business model as reclaiming degraded lands is an income generating activity.

Madam Moderator,

Restoring degraded lands in LLDCs constitutes an opportunity to create labour intensive millions of green jobs for young people who in turn would refrain from engaging into forced migrations at the peril of their lives. In the same time, it would empower rural women for they are the ones to bear most of the brunt of desertification, land degradation and drought.

Land Restoration will ensure food security, thus allowing to feed LLDCs increasing population. It also means economic stability for LLDCs depend very much on agricultural produce export. 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. They are primarily producers of agricultural products. At the same time, they are among the worst affected by land degradation and desertification.

Land restoration will also bring more peace and stability. It is no-brainer that in LLDCs, land degradation, desertification and drought create instability. Not only they entrench people in poverty, they jeopardize food security, increase water stress locally and regionally and trigger biodiversity loss and deforestation. DLDD impacts the achievement of sustainable development. The geography of conflict coincides with that of land degradation.

Restored landscapes also have the potential to sequester carbon. The 2 billion hectares that can be potentially restored if LDN is achieved have the capacity to sequester 25% of carbon emissions, thereby contributing to bridging the emissions gap while building resilience to climatic shocks for LLDCs which are especially vulnerable.

And we have several success stories in land rehabilitation in LLDCs with positive impacts on the living conditions of their inhabitants. Let us pick two countries.

Farmers in Ethiopia and Niger have recovered the productivity of entire regions. More than 5 million hectares have been restored in Niger's Zinder province, boosting food security for more than 2.5 million people. Bringing life back to these degraded lands is however possible through sustainable land management techniques. Ethiopia's Tigray region is a compelling example of this, where 15 million hectares of land have been restored in the past two decades. These countries are on the path to meeting growing food demand and producing surpluses for export.

Madam Moderator, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Drought is not a charismatic disaster, like a tsunami or an earthquake. It doesn't happen overnight. Instead it is slow and silent, insidiously creeping upon us. That is why its impact is often hugely underestimated. So far, drought causes more deaths and displacement than tsunami and

earthquakes combined. Drought bears a heavy cost on countries' economies, including the most developed of them and entrenches poverty and hunger. Drought is the most economically disruptive of all extreme weather events, especially in LLDCs. They have a disproportionate impact on the African poor, especially women and children. So far, the approach of the international community to drought has been largely reactive, with post-impact interventions and relief measures in the form of emergency assistance programs aimed at providing money or other specific types of assistance such as food, livestock feed, water, etc. to the victims (or those experiencing the most severe impacts).

UNCCD secretariat has initiated the implementation of drought initiative in countries prone to drought especially the LLDCs in providing assistance to develop early warning systems, vulnerability and risk assessment, and mitigation measures. Drought must be addressed, otherwise all sustainable development efforts will be in vain.

In concluding, and responding to your call, the mid-term review of the Vienna Programme of Action should serve as an occasion to commit LLDCs as follows:

- Since the General Assembly recognized achieving land degradation neutrality as an accelerator and integrator to achieve other SDGs, LLDCs should make this a priority for their sustainable development policies and programmes. Restoring degraded lands should be central.
- LLDCs are vulnerable to climate change shocks, especially frequent and prolonged droughts. LLDCs should all develop drought policies with the support of UNCCD secretariat.
- Adopt land-based solutions to climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience building.