

UNCCD management response:

Evaluation of the UNCCD support to the development of transformative projects and programmes for land degradation neutrality

Overview

The formative evaluation concerning the UNCCD support to the development of transformative projects and programmes for land degradation neutrality (LDN TPP) provides an assessment of the LDN TPP performance so far: what has worked well to date, and how can the support be improved in the future. The Global Mechanism (GM) welcomes the evaluation report as a carefully crafted, focused and practical information on the LDN TPP. It is a timely input to the considerations on the future work on LDN, with many concrete ideas to improve and develop further activities.

Building on the earlier theory of change for the land degradation neutrality target-setting programme, the evaluation report presents a clear and useful theory of change for the LDN TPP, which organizes the various components to a logical continuum and spells out the expected (causal) linkages between the outputs and outcomes/impact. The theory of change is used in the report to demonstrate the progress made, and to point out the areas where further work is needed. This clarifies the conceptual setting of the LDN TPP, its successes and remaining challenges, which will be useful for the further development and targeting of LDN activities by the GM and its partners.

The GM and the secretariat appreciate the generally positive findings and outlook for the LDN TPP. The finding on the good progress made in raising the profile, understanding and application of gender mainstreaming within LDN project designs is particularly valued, as this is an area for which the GM has placed plenty of effort recently. The GM was also most pleased to learn of the appreciation of the LDN TPP partner agencies of the GM technical capacity, and its role as a broker.

The recommendations of the evaluation report offer practical ways forward in supporting countries to meet their LDN targets, and they are also well in line with the current LDN approach and process priorities of the UNCCD.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The GM should explore options (in line with its mandate) for continued engagement with the interventions they have supported, potentially taking the form of a TPP project ‘succession’ strategy (as opposed to an ‘exit’ strategy). The approach could be based on the following objectives:

- **Strengthen the implementation and sustainability of LDN**
- **Increase the likelihood that LDN design principles – especially gender-responsive design principles – are applied as intended**
- **Build a global knowledge base around how LDN can be delivered in practice**
- **Gather learning from projects under implementation to improve the GM’s own monitoring and decision-making processes**

Any continued involvement will have significant resource implications for the GM, so there is a strong case for restricting engagement to a limited sample of projects. The above objectives could double-up as selection criteria for the GM when deciding which projects to support.

Management response: Partially accepted. The mandate of the GM focuses on facilitating/supporting country Parties' efforts on the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the UNCCD and does not extend to it becoming an active partner in project implementation. However, and subject to available resources, the GM, together with the secretariat, will explore options for continuing its involvement, taking into account its limited capacity and existing and potential partnerships.

Recommendation 2:

The UNCCD / GM should review financial management, approval processes and standard operating procedures to ensure that individual project managers have the necessary flexibility to respond efficiently to time-sensitive support requests. For the TPP project (and indeed for any other demand-driven projects that need to respond to time-sensitive opportunities) two specific adjustments would be highly beneficial:

- Delegated authorities that allow for a degree of unplanned, 'off-workplan' expenditure
- Permanent, day-to-day access to central financial monitoring data (Umoja)

Management response: Accepted. Many improvements mentioned in the recommendation are already underway: financial approval processes are being streamlined, GM is developing its new business model including standard operating procedures, and the delegation of authority for the GM managing director has been extended. Further developments, notably on GM access to real-time financial data, will be explored for relevant GM staff ensuring that there is no duplication of roles.

Recommendation 3:

The GM should develop a more extensive monitoring strategy that focuses on measuring the longer-term influence and contribution of the TPP project. This could be based on periodic measurement of the project's theory of change and should make use of publicly available monitoring data that all successfully funded projects will be required (by donors) to gather. The strategy could be based on the following objectives:

- Improve understanding of the nature and extent of the GM's long-term influence on LDN
- Improve understanding on which approaches to achieving LDN are most effective and sustainable
- Improve understanding on the pace and extent of LDN
- (Potentially) strengthen the case for increased resources for the UNCCD and GM

Management response: Accepted, with the note that the first two bullet points above should refer to UNCCD implementation, not only LDN. The GM will develop a monitoring strategy that focuses on measuring the longer-term influence and contribution of the TPP project. This monitoring strategy will be aligned with the GM business model and information provided by technical and funding partners.

Recommendation 4:

The GM should develop a set of clear descriptions / briefings on LDN's links with climate change, based entirely on lay language. An explicit objective of this work should be to provide potential TPPs with material that can directly inform climate finance project proposals and any associated requirements to define a project's relevance and contribution to addressing climate change.

Management response: Partially accepted, with the note that the GM will focus specifically on climate finance. The UNCCD Secretariat (STI and ERPA) are preparing a new publication/guidance document on LDN and Climate Change that could serve as a guidance or reference material for countries when developing TPPs targeting climate finance. In collaboration with the secretariat and other partners, the GM will explore the possibility of developing capacity building and awareness materials on the linkages between LDN and climate change mitigation and adaptation to inform project design and access to finance.