



# GEF Focal Area: Land Degradation

## Scope of the Challenge

The deterioration of soil fertility, the loss of forest cover, and the erosion of rangelands reduce the ability of the land to grow food, provide products, and maintain the health of local ecosystems that support countless other species. Globally, land degradation adversely affects the ecological integrity and productivity of about 2 billion ha, nearly one-quarter of all landscapes under human use.

Agricultural lands in both dryland and forest areas have been most severely affected by land degradation. They cover about one-fourth of the world's total land area and account for 95 percent of all animal and plant protein and 99 percent of calories consumed by people. About two-thirds of agricultural land has been degraded to some extent during the last 50 years, and up to 40 percent of the world's agricultural land is seriously degraded.

Land degradation is a worldwide challenge, substantially affecting productivity in more than 80 countries and especially serious in Africa where 36 countries face dryland degradation or desertification. The impact of land degradation has already put at risk the livelihoods, economic well-being, and nutritional status of more than 1 billion people in developing countries.

## KEY FACTS

- Land degradation adversely affects the ecological integrity and productivity of about 2 billion ha, or 23 percent of landscapes under human use.
- Up to 40 percent of the world's agricultural land is seriously degraded.
- The GEF has invested \$332 million in 88 projects and programs supporting sustainable land management to combat desertification and deforestation.
- \$2.4 billion has been leveraged in cofinancing to help the global environment while simultaneously improving the livelihoods of millions of rural people who rely on agriculture, forests, and rangelands.

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## GEF Response

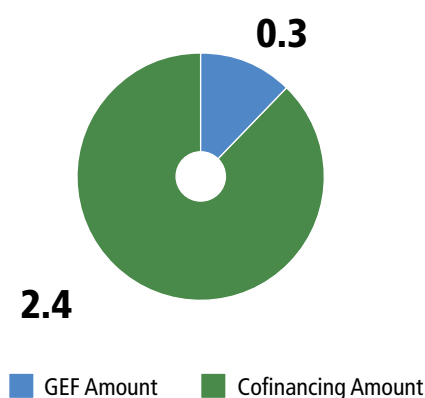
In 2002, the GEF mandate was expanded to include the fight against land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation, as a focal area to support the United Nations Conven-



#### SUMMARY BY FOCAL AREA:

#### LAND DEGRADATION

Amounts in billion USD



tion to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). This decision, coupled with the GEF's designation as a financial mechanism for the UNCCD, made sustainable land management a major focus of the GEF.

The GEF's program on promoting sustainable land management focuses on integrated approaches to natural resources management, covering all the major rural land use systems: agriculture, rangeland, and forestry.

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The GEF's land degradation focal area holistic view is unique. The focus is not on individual benefits, but rather on synergies among various GEF focal areas. Projects are targeted at integrating sustainable land management into national development priorities; strengthening human, technical, and institutional capacities; creating needed policy and regulatory reforms; and implementing innovative sustainable land management practices.

The GEF work also emphasizes partnerships as the basis for sustainable land management. In addition to working with its implementing and executing agencies, the GEF partners with the scientific community, nongovernmental organizations, bilateral agencies, and others to tackle the complexity of land degradation issues. Moreover, GEF projects promote collaboration within countries, helping government agencies work together and harmonize their policies and programs in order to provide an enabling environment for sustainable land management.

An essential part of this work is supporting on-the-ground investments to address land degradation. These investment funds are packaged in a number of ways to improve the livelihood of local people and to preserve or restore the health of local ecosystems, ensuring the human goods and services they provide continues.

#### Priorities and Projects

The GEF focuses on projects and investments related to sustainable agriculture, rangeland, and forest management.

## AGRICULTURE

Sustainable agricultural practices can help maintain or improve the productivity of both rain-fed and irrigated agriculture.

The GEF promotes sustainable agriculture that integrates environmental health, economic profitability, equity, and social objectives. At the technical level, GEF projects promote crop diversification, crop rotation, water harvesting, and small-scale irrigation schemes. Projects also address human resources in sustainable agriculture, including the working and living conditions of farmers, the needs of rural communities, and consumer health and safety.

The GEF advocates a “landscape approach” that addresses the interconnections between systems at different scales: from the individual farms, to the local ecosystems, to the communities affected by farming systems locally, regionally, and globally. This approach allows a larger and more comprehensive view of the consequences of farming practices on both human communities and the environment.

## RANGELAND

The GEF promotes the sustainable management of rangelands through the strengthening of viable traditional rangeland management systems and other measures that improve soil and water conservation. Activities also support the GEF goal of conserving biodiversity resources, and their sustainable use.

The GEF emphasizes rangeland management systems that livestock producers need to sustainably prosper: management planning, animal selection, animal nutrition and reproduction, herd health, and grazing management.



## RANGELAND MANAGEMENT IN PATAGONIA

Argentina's Patagonia region is a rich mosaic of varied arid and semi-arid areas, interspersed with riparian wetlands. The ecosystems collectively support a rich diversity of species, but land degradation now affects an estimated 85 percent of Patagonia. This caused mainly by overgrazing in the rural areas, where rearing livestock, principally sheep, has been the main productive activity for more than a century.

A GEF project is helping to control land degradation in Patagonia through the promotion of sustainable rangeland management practices to restore ecosystems to their full integrity, stability, and functions. The project helps sheep breeders and herders adopt sustainable rangeland management practices, and complements a sustainable sheep husbandry program.

## CONTACT

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### FORESTS

The GEF promotes sustainable forest management that views the forest as an integrated whole rather than as the source of any one economic product or service (for example, timber or climate regulator). GEF activities support the introduction and strengthening of sustainable forest management schemes, including

- Participation and benefit of forest users
- Clear and respected tenure and use rights
- Respect for indigenous people
- Sustainable market chain
- Development and implementation of forest management plans
- Reforestation.



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