



Combating Land Degradation

MAIN ISSUE

Land is a vital resource to humankind, like air and water. Land degradation—the progressive deterioration or loss of the productive capacity of soils for present and future—is linked to key aspects of human security and well-being: food, jobs, health, and livelihoods.

Desertification—the extreme form of land degradation in drylands—already affects 3.5 billion people, especially rural communities, smallholder farmers, and the very poor.

Drought is one of the major drivers of global food and water insecurity, affecting crop and livestock production, and access to food and water. Drought can, in extreme cases, force people to abandon their land, and resort to migration as a last livelihood strategy.

Every year, 12 million hectares (ha) of land become unproductive due to desertification and drought, threatening the livelihoods of more than 1 billion people in some 100 countries.

Through innovative and integrated approaches to sustainable land

management (SLM) across the range of agro-ecological and climatic zones, the GEF aims to deliver multiple global environmental benefits in reducing and reverting land degradation, conserving biodiversity, and mitigating and adapting to climate change while creating local socioeconomic benefits and contributing to communities' livelihoods.

This mandate relates directly to the GEF's role as a financial mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The GEF actively supports the UNCCD's voluntary Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) target and provides the opportunity for eligible countries to implement the UNCCD.

The private sector, including small and medium enterprises, is playing a growing role in achieving the voluntary LDN targets. To that end, the GEF's Non-Grant Instruments or "Blended Finance" window has been applying innovative finance models that help mobilize private investments to combat global environmental degradation.



WHAT WE DO

The GEF-8 (2022-2026) land degradation focal area (LDFA) strategy contributes to UNCCD goals through four objectives:

1. Avoid and reduce land degradation through SLM.
2. Reverse land degradation through landscape restoration.
3. Address desertification, land degradation, and drought issues, particularly in drylands.
4. Improve the enabling policy and institutional framework for LDN.

RESULTS

The GEF-7 cycle has invested \$1,310 million in the LDFA, and related projects and programs. This investment has leveraged \$9,396 million in co-financing, supporting 49 stand-alone projects and 93 multi-focal area projects in 90 countries. In addition, the Small Grants Programme includes SLM as an important element.

Through its investments, GEF-7 has restored 8 million ha, supported improved production practices on 167 million ha, sequestered or avoided 1,446 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent in the agriculture, forestry and other land-use sector; and benefited 74 million people, including 36 million women.

The GEF also helps countries report to the UNCCD and build related capacity through global set-aside resources. Indeed, 122 countries endorsed a request to support UNCCD Enabling Activities (reporting, formulation of national strategies and plans, and related capacity-building). For the first time since the GEF began supporting such activities, all countries from sub-Saharan Africa are participating.





GEF-8 Provides New Opportunities for Implementation of the UNCCD's LDN concept.

Land Degradation Focal Area Strategy

GEF-8 has allocated \$618 million to the LDFA, which is a 30% increase over GEF-7. Building on the successes of GEF-7, the new strategy will encourage investment in integrated programs (IPs) that support the needs of the UNCCD.

Objective One of the strategy (avoid and reduce land degradation through SLM) promotes the wider application and upscaling of various types of SLM interventions that improve productivity and maintain or improve flow of agro-ecosystem services that underpin food production and livelihoods.

Objective Two of the strategy (reverse land degradation through landscape restoration) helps countries restore agro-ecosystem services and avoid the reduction of trees and vegetative cover; and restore forests, and avoid forest loss and degradation, including through SFM.

Objective Three of the strategy (address desertification, land degradation, and drought issues, particularly in drylands) helps countries build resilience to mitigate the effects of drought and to prevent the aggravating effects of land degradation, within GEF's mandate, through (i) comprehensive land-use planning taking drought risks into account; and (ii) implementation of drought-smart land management, including croplands, rangelands, dryland forests, and mixed land uses.

Objective Four of the strategy (improve the enabling policy and institutional framework for LDN) helps countries (i) improve policy coherence and financing systems; (ii) further develop the institutional and regulatory framework, and build capacity; and (iii) provide support to UNCCD Enabling Activities to fulfill planning and reporting obligations.

Please see GEF-8 Land Degradation Strategy for a detailed description of programming and investment opportunities.



GEF-8 Integrated Programs

Eleven IPs form part of the GEF-8 Programming Directions and strongly complement the GEF-8 LDFA strategy (see table below). The IPs cover a wide array of thematic areas of direct relevance to the UNCCD. They provide countries with additional opportunities to address the underlying drivers of land degradation in comprehensive ways.

By adopting an integrated approach to natural resources management, the LDFA drives an agenda for multiple global environmental benefits. These include benefits related to the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the protection and sustainable use of international waters. In this regard, joint programming with other GEF focal areas will be actively pursued, especially in the context of IPs.

During GEF-8, the GEF will continue working on Food Systems and Forest Biomes as IPs. In addition, other programs include the Blue and Green Islands (which will address SLM in Small Island Developing States) and the Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator (which will promote Nature-based Solutions, NbS).

Furthermore, the Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program will generate multiple environmental benefits, create jobs, and secure livelihoods through the restoration of degraded ecosystems globally.

All these programs will contribute significantly to achieving LDN, complementing efforts toward avoiding degradation and restoration under the LDFA with a broader scope on multiple benefits and at a larger scale.

GEF-8 will also draw on lessons learned from the previous strategy. Within the GEF's mandate, the implementation of relevant aspects of national drought plans can be supported through their inclusion in land-use planning and drought-smart land management, and should be coordinated with initiatives of other donors supporting climate change adaptation, including the LDCF. Engaging the private sector leverages funding and expertise to transform key economic systems in food and agriculture, cities, transport, and materials production. Finally, improving access of women to resources and empowering them to take decisions increases the effectiveness and sustainability of LDFA investments.



GEF-8 Integrated Program	Program Objective
Amazon, Congo, and Critical Forest Biomes	Maintain the integrity of globally important intact tropical forests through conservation and effective governance.
Wildlife Conservation for Development	Conserve wildlife and landscapes by transforming the drivers of species loss and ensure that countries and communities benefit from conservation.
Blue and Green Islands	Incorporate the value of nature into national decision making and support Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to address development challenges of Small Island Developing States related to food security, adaptation, tourism, and urban development.
Ecosystem Restoration	Restore degraded ecosystems and generate multiple environmental and socioeconomic benefits through an integrated approach.
Food Systems	Catalyze the transformation to sustainable food systems that are nature-positive, resilient, and pollution-reduced.
Net-Zero Nature-Positive Accelerator	Accelerate implementation of nature-positive, net-zero pathways by investing in nature and new technologies.
Clean and Healthy Ocean	Contribute to a sustainable blue economy by curbing coastal pollution from agricultural, industrial, and municipal sources through infrastructure investments combined with NbS.
Greening Transportation Infrastructure	Enable countries to develop portfolios of transportation infrastructure projects at national or land/seascape levels that build in environmental sustainability from inception to provide biodiversity, avoided land degradation, and climate change mitigation benefits and outcomes.
Sustainable Cities	Advance integrated and systems-based approaches toward building net-zero carbon, nature-positive, inclusive and climate-resilient cities.
Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains	Significantly reduce or eliminate the environmental degradation caused by globally significant supply chains, with a focus on fashion and construction.
Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution	Catalyze circular economy approaches to reduce plastic production, consumption, and disposal focusing on packaging, particularly single-use related to the food and beverage sector.





The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a family of funds dedicated to confronting biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution, and strains on land and ocean health. Its grants, blended financing, and policy support helps developing countries address their biggest environmental priorities and adhere to international environmental conventions. Over the past three decades, the GEF has provided more than \$22 billion and mobilized \$120 billion in co-financing for more than 5,000 national and regional projects.