Checklist for Land Degradation Neutrality Transformative Projects and Programmes (LDN TPP)

1. Purpose of the checklist

- To provide project developers with clear guidance in designing Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) transformative projects, while avoiding to be prescriptive;
- To define the key features of LDN transformative projects based on the Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN (LDN-SCF)[1];
- To ensure that the guiding principles of the LDN-SCF are considered to the extent feasible during the design of LDN transformative projects; *and*
- To ensure that given proposals are gender responsive, committed to gender equality and comply with the environmental and social safeguard standards of the target funding sources.

Box 1: Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in a nutshell

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) defines LDN as "a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remain stable or increase within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems" (decision 3/COP.12, UNCCD, 2015).

The goal is maintaining or enhancing the land resource base – in other words, the stocks of natural capital associated with land resources and the ecosystem services that flow from them.

The objectives of LDN are to:
• maintain or improve the sustainable delivery of ecosystem services;
• maintain or improve productivity, in order to enhance food security;
• increase resilience of the land and populations dependent on the land;
• seek synergies with other social, economic and environmental objectives; and
• reinforce responsible and inclusive governance of land. (Orr et al. 2017: 3)

LDN is being pursued in the context of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development which seeks to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations (Preamble of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development). Leaving no one behind is an overarching principle in the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This principle must also be embedded in LDN Transformative Projects and Programmes (TPP).

Box 2: What is transformation in the realm of LDN?

Transformation is defined as a change in the fundamental attributes of natural and human systems (IPCC 2014).

Transformations are shifts that fundamentally alter system functions, interactions and feedbacks.

LDN TPP seek to generate and sustain fundamental and sustainable positive change in the coupled human-environmental system where interventions are targeted. Positive transformation in the frame of LDN TPP can be pursued through sustainable and inclusive interventions at scale (e.g., in landscapes) while featuring innovation in terms of locally adapted technology, practices and financial mechanisms (e.g., blended finance).

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2. Six defining features of LDN Transformative Projects and Programmes

A. Features that are fundamental to LDN

☐ Use a landscape approach by choosing an area large enough to involve multiple land units of a variety of land types (e.g., within a watershed), sectors and jurisdictions/administrative boundaries that are inclusive of different land tenure governance (communal, private and public land);

☐ Employ fundamental elements of the LDN-SCF[2]:
  ✓ Promote neutrality (i.e., counterbalancing for no net loss) within the project area[3];
  ✓ Use the response hierarchy through a mosaic of interventions across different land units to avoid > reduce > reverse land degradation; *and*

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[1] See Orr et al. (2017): Scientific-Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality. Available at:
<https://www.unccd.int/publications/scientific-conceptual-framework-land-degradation-neutrality-report-science-policy>.
[2] Following the guidance provided in the LDN-SCF, Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry (VGGT) and safeguards are key to how LDN can be pursued with less risk of unintended consequences associated with land tenure insecurity, land appropriation and land conflict.
[3] Neutrality can be achieved also at landscape level, or at sub/national level: net surplus produced in the project area can counterbalance the net loss in other parts of the country, advancing LDN in the country.

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✓ Present the interventions according to land type[4] for each component of the response hierarchy.

☐ Contribute to (sub)national LDN targets;

☐ Select project location considering the countries' priorities identified through their national sustainable development plans and/or land use planning policy/legislation and/or LDN target setting process;

☐ Include a monitoring system consistent with national LDN targets and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, particularly SDG 15.3 and its indicator 15.3.1 on LDN;

☐ Ensure there are mitigating measures for potential leakage (negative offsite effects as opposed to positive spillover effects) beyond the project area;

☐ Ensure the commitment to the principle of gender equality throughout the entire process;

☐ Apply methods to manage or minimise environmental, economic, social and cultural trade-offs;

☐ Ensure methods for gender responsive evaluation and adaptive learning are applied throughout the project cycle;

☐ Establish a system that involves relevant stakeholders in the regular monitoring and validation of LDN status reporting as well as project implementation outcomes, with a particular attention to gender.

B. Features that deliver multiple benefits

☐ Create linkages to multiple SDGs by designing interventions that generate multiple environmental, economic and social benefits, while minimising trade-offs and maximising synergies and taking into account the different needs and priorities of women and men;

☐ Show a clear pathway to deliver multiple benefits whereby gains in natural capital contribute to improved and more sustainable livelihoods;

☐ Provide economic incentives that benefit both men and women to improve livelihoods (e.g., creation of green jobs and enhanced access to inclusive credit lines);

☐ Promote land use decisions based on an assessment approach[5] which takes into account, *inter alia*:

✓ land potential, land condition, resilience;
✓ social, cultural and economic factors and their impacts, including consideration of vulnerable groups and gender[6];
✓ participation of relevant stakeholders representing key land uses and land governance systems in the intervention area/landscape;
✓ both short and long term sustainability.

☐ Identify land-based pathways for improving livelihoods, sustainable food systems and/or inclusive as well as sustainable value chains for current and future generations.

C. Features that promote responsible and inclusive governance

☐ Safeguard land rights of local land users including individual and collective access to land, land tenure and resource rights, inheritance and customary rights;[7]

☐ Ensure free, prior and informed consent[8] of indigenous people and local communities for any activities affecting their rights to land, territories and resources;

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[4] Definition of land type: "Class of land with respect to land potential, which is distinguished by the combination of edaphic, geomorphological, topographic, hydrological, biological and climatic features that support the actual or historic vegetation structure and species composition on that land. Used in counterbalancing "like for like". (Orr et al. 2017: 15)

[5] Gender analysis is one of the cornerstones of gender mainstreaming, but is often a weak link in the overall programme planning process. It involves efforts to understand if, how and why issues affect women and men differently and unequally within a particular context or development sector, and what options exist to address them. The diagnosis also encompasses the current policy environment, the political climate, the organizational structures and cultures in which an agency/programme is situated, and the availability of resources; and it builds on what has been learned from well-evaluated experiences from previous programmes. Prerequisite resources for effective gender analysis include: specialized expertise in gender issues and sector-specific technical expertise to conduct or to use research: time for analysis of data; and access to adequate and flexible financial resources for new research. Gender analysis also relies upon access to national data such as gender statistics, operations research (i.e., findings derived from testing pilot projects, and from programme monitoring and evaluation) as well as qualitative data generated through policy and academic research and participation assessments. For an overview with further resources : UN –Women (2014): Guidance note Gender mainstreaming in development programming, p.15. et seq. http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/02/gender-mainstreaming-issues,

[6] See SDG indicator 5.A.1(a) and also the UNCCD Gender Action Plan based on decision 30/COP.13, UNCCD 2017: 3-9). Available at: <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/2018-01/GAP%20ENG%20%20low%20res_0.pdf>.

[7] See recommendations made to the country parties of the UNCCD by civil society regarding land rights (Decision 5/COP.13, UNCCD 2017).

[8] In conformity with relevant UN Conventions, including United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Indigenous People (especially Art 19 and Art 32) https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf; and International Labour Organization Convention 169 especially Part II Land) C.f. http://www.eods.eu/library/ILO_Indigenous%20and%20Tribal%20Peoples%20Convention_1989_EN.pdf. More information in: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2013): Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ipeoples/freepriorandinformedconsent.pdf

□ Define mechanisms for ensuring gender-responsive engagement of key stakeholders in project design and implementation;

□ Ensure strong gender equality, inclusiveness, accountability and transparency in land use decisions and planning;

□ Avoid forced displacement/involuntary resettlement resulting from the intervention;

□ Strengthen or develop institutional arrangements through collaboration with the range of actors at multiple administrative levels;

□ Strengthen or develop a grievance redress mechanism.

D. Features that promote the scale out and up of what works

□ Employ science based and local and indigenous knowledge as well as best practices including sustainable land management that contributes to land-based climate change adaptation and mitigation[9];

□ Apply innovative locally adapted technologies, tools, and techniques that consider context and target group specificities including, for instance, local and indigenous knowledge and traditional practices;

□ Capture and disseminate what is learned from the interventions and identify ways to address knowledge gaps through accessing all knowledge forms, and where necessary conducting research;

□ Ensure there is adequate investment in activities designed to scale-up and out best practices.

E. Features that enhance (sub)national ownership and capacities

□ Identify and employ capacity development mechanisms such as public awareness, education and capacity-building campaigns that are aligned with enduring domestic procedures, tailored to the specific needs and social behaviors of both women and men, and existing national strategies and programmes;

□ Identify and employ domestic public and private financing vehicles, including co-financing arrangements that ensure the cost-efficient pursuit of multiple benefits;

□ Identify and employ strategies which can ensure the positive impact of the intervention beyond the project lifetime.

F. Features that leverage innovative finance (especially private sector)

□ Include/prepare for an investment component that leverages private sector mobilisation;

□ Foster activities that incentivise income generation and job creation for the communities in the project intervention areas;

□ Identify and leverage innovative and sustainable finance mechanisms which create incentives for and/or directly reward land stewardship;

□ Promote innovative financing (e.g., blended finance, green bonds) from broad range of financing sources (climate finance, development finance, domestic finance – national forest funds, special taxation scheme, etc.).

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[9] See Sanz et al. (2017). Available at: <https://www2.unccd.int/publications/sustainable-land-management-contribution-successful-land-based-climate-change>.