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International environmental policy and governance issues

Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/14 on strengthening international efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, promote land conservation and sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality, and enhance drought resilience

Report of the Executive Director

I Introduction

1. The present report provides an update on progress made in the implementation of resolution 6/14 of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on strengthening international efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, promote land conservation and sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality, and enhance drought resilience. In the resolution, the Environment Assembly, requested the Executive Director of UNEP, subject to the availability of resources, and in cooperation and collaboration with the Convention to Combat Desertification, the other Rio conventions, United Nations entities and programmes and other relevant organizations, within the scope of their respective mandates, in their efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, promote land conservation and sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality, and enhance drought resilience, to: (a) Facilitate the sharing of knowledge; (b) Enhance data availability and bridge data gaps, in particular for countries with affected or threatened areas, including through the use of innovative technologies; (c) Facilitate the mobilization of adequate and additional resources to support Member States in their efforts; and to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its seventh session on the actions taken to implement the present resolution.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/14

2. UNEP's portfolio on land degradation currently comprises over 70 ongoing projects implemented across 132 countries, representing a total grant value exceeding US\$ 400 million. These projects address various components of land degradation and support Member States in advancing sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality and restoration efforts. These projects are primarily funded through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Least Developed Country Fund (LDCF).
3. The UNEP portfolio addressing land degradation demonstrates significant impact. This included the restoration of 275,334 hectares of land, the implementation of improved practices across 1,377,390 hectares of landscapes, the restoration of 2,185,193 hectares of forests and direct impact extended to 2,927,076 beneficiaries because of these land degradation interventions.
4. UNEP has provided critical technical assistance to over 120 Country Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) enabling their effective compilation and submission of National Reports. For the upcoming 2026 reporting cycle, UNEP is further supporting 104 countries with financial resources mobilized through the Global Environment Facility (GEF). UNEP also provides technical guidance and capacity-building to facilitate timely and comprehensive reporting to the UNCCD. This National Reporting process is crucial for tracking the Convention's implementation, providing Country Parties with vital data on the state of land, and informing policymaking decisions.
5. UNEP's support for previous UNCCD national reporting cycles underscores the critical role of continuous capacity building, user-friendly tools, and reliable data management in enhancing country parties' ability to track progress on land degradation. UNEP will continue to integrate these insights into the future reporting cycles by strengthening technical assistance, enhancing data quality assurance, and fostering greater alignment between national reporting and the Sustainable Development Goals.
6. In collaboration with the UNCCD Secretariat, UNEP continues facilitating the improvement of the UNCCD Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS) portal. This platform provides a standardized methodology for national reporting on land degradation and desertification, thereby enhancing accountability and supporting evidence-based policy development.
7. UNEP has developed a large-scale programme aimed at restoring landscapes and enhancing ecosystem services to build resilience among communities in arid and semi-arid regions along the Great Green Wall in the Sahel. A multi-trust fund GEF and LDCF grant of US\$77.9 million has been approved to support programme development and implementation in Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal.
8. UNEP actively promotes wastewater reuse to align with land degradation and build drought resilience. Projects focus on technical assistance, advocacy, strategic partnerships, and knowledge sharing. This involves the safe treatment and repurposing of water and nutrients from wastewater for irrigation, afforestation, reforestation, and groundwater recharge, thereby reducing reliance on freshwater resources.
9. Concurrently, UNEP addresses pollution prevention by highlighting the significant socio-economic and environmental impacts of discharging untreated wastewater. Such practices threaten public health, contaminate soil, reduce agricultural productivity, and exacerbate land degradation. A key focus is on restoring ecosystems, particularly wetlands, which function as natural filters for pollution and mitigate the effects of land degradation. An example of this approach is the Islah constructed wetland pilot project in southern Iraq, which utilizes nature-based solutions to treat 5,000 cubic meters of wastewater daily. The project directly addresses critical challenges in the area, such as drought, population displacement, and pollution, demonstrating the tangible benefits of restoring natural water treatment systems.
10. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) continues its focus to halt and reverse the destruction and degradation of billions of hectares of ecosystems. The initiative is co-led by

UNEP and FAO and is building a strong, broad-based global movement to ramp up restoration and put the world on track for a sustainable future. That includes building political momentum for restoration, supporting technical capacities and monitoring as well as thousands of initiatives on the ground. The Multi-Partner Trust Fund has been set up to scale up these activities, and current contributions (from Germany and Denmark) amount to appx. US\$ 33 million. Additional resource mobilization is ongoing.

11. With the World Restoration Flagships, the UN is honouring the best examples of large-scale and long-term ecosystem restoration in any country or region, embodying the 10 Restoration Principles of the UN Decade. Out of 20 current Flagships, 11 are terrestrial and therefore focusing on halting and reversing land degradation, including some specific restoration activities in the drylands or areas affected by drought.

12. Under the UN Decade, UNEP closely works with UNCCD G20 Global Land Initiative via joint activities, events, messages and synergies in terms of land restoration – therefore advancing coordinated support and engagement with the Member States and restoration partners.

III. Lessons learned

13. The successful implementation of a resolution of this scope faces potential challenges due to insufficient funding. While significant financial commitments are involved, additional funding, particularly from the private sector, will be crucial to advance this agenda. This further investment is essential to scale up the approaches outlined in the resolution and to facilitate the vital process of learning and drawing meaningful lessons from their implementation. Under UNEP's fiscal austerity anticipated in the next MTS, tradeoffs will need to be made to ensure a realistic and aligned portfolio in this space. Lastly, opportunities to engage more closely with other UN agencies with similar and synergistic mandates are needed to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

14. The resolution requests UNEP to enhance knowledge sharing, data availability, and address existing data gaps. However, funding allocated to these critical areas remains minimal. While efforts are underway to secure funding from mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), there is a significant risk. Without dedicated financial provisions for these learning activities, the availability of information will likely remain limited, preventing the resolution from effectively addressing the identified information gaps.

15. Integrating the private sector, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IP&LC) and gender issues in efforts to address desertification and halt land degradation is crucial for success. The involvement of the private sector is key due to its significant influence on land use and its capacity to drive innovation and investment at scale. Indigenous Peoples and local communities are crucial as rights-holders and ecological stewards since almost half of terrestrial land areas is estimated to be held by Indigenous Peoples and other local communities; indigenous knowledge also greatly contributes to sustainability discourse and restoration agenda. Gender integration is critical because women, particularly in rural communities, are disproportionately affected by land degradation and possess unique knowledge and roles that are vital for effective solutions.

IV. Recommendations and suggested actions

UNEP will continue to:

16. Further strengthen cooperation and collaboration with the UNCCD Secretariat, other Rio Conventions, relevant United Nations entities and programmes, and other organizations to ensure a cohesive and integrated approach to combating desertification and land degradation, aligned with respective mandates.

17. Continue to leverage and expand the use of innovative technologies for data collection and monitoring, building upon platforms such as the UNCCD PRAIS portal, to improve the accuracy and accessibility of land-related information.

18. Sustain and expand technical assistance and capacity-building support to Country Parties for national reporting processes to the UNCCD, ensuring comprehensive data collection and effective tracking of the Convention's implementation.
19. Explore the mobilization of additional and diversified financial resources, particularly from the private sector, including innovative financing mechanisms and public-private partnerships to incentivize private sector investment in sustainable land management and restoration initiatives, recognizing their significant influence on land use and capacity for large-scale investment.
20. Pursue the systematic integration of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities and gender considerations across all land degradation interventions, recognizing the disproportionate impacts on these stakeholders and their vital role, traditional and indigenous knowledge, and unique contributions to effective solutions.

The Environment Assembly may wish to:

21. Encourage Members States to strengthen national legal and policy frameworks, where they develop, enact, and enforce robust national laws and policies that directly support the objectives of the UNCCD, including integrating sustainable land management (SLM) principles into all relevant sectors, such as agriculture, water management, energy, and infrastructure development.
22. Invite Members States to increase domestic financial investment by increasing their national budgetary allocations for combating land degradation, desertification and drought and to create and scale initiatives, such as payment for ecosystem services schemes, to encourage farmers, landowners, and the private sector to adopt and invest in sustainable land management practices and land restoration initiatives.
23. Encourage Member States to implement clear and secure land rights for local communities, indigenous peoples, and women, to provide the security needed for long-term investment in the health and productivity of the land, serving as a powerful driver for sustainable land management practices.
24. Invite Member States to invest in national research institutions to develop and adapt innovative, locally suited technologies and practices for SLM, and to strengthen agricultural and land management extension services to ensure this knowledge and technology effectively reaches land users on the ground, bridging the gap between research and practice.
25. Encourage member states to develop, strengthen and enforce their implementation of integrated land use planning processes at national and sub-national levels, involving strategically zoning land for different uses such as agriculture, conservation, urban development, infrastructure to minimize degradation, protect critical ecosystems, and manage competing demands on land resources sustainably.