



Land Restoration to Safeguard Nature and Livelihoods

UNCCD and CBD Working Together

Land use change is considered the greatest threat to nature and is projected to have the largest global impact on biodiversity by the year 2100, followed by climate change, nitrogen deposition, and species introductions.¹

This Synergy Brief highlights the shared agenda of land restoration and resilience,² central to both the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)³ of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It identifies where and how complementarities can enhance their synergistic implementation at global and national levels, increasing the efficiency and impact of limited finance and delivering multiple benefits for both people and the planet.

Land covers less than 30 per cent of the earth's surface yet is home to 85 per cent of all species. Land comprises a variety of terrestrial ecosystems – from forests and grasslands to agroecosystems – that provide a broad range of essential goods and services vital to sustaining all life. Biodiversity above and below ground supports the ecological processes that underpin the healthy and beneficial functions of land.

Ecosystem conversion and land degradation – the loss of biological and economic productivity and complexity⁴ – are major drivers of biodiversity loss and a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. This confluence of largely human-induced environmental challenges is eroding the planetary life support systems upon which the prosperity and wellbeing of current and future generations depend.⁵

A growing and more affluent global population will demand more land-based commodities while teleconnections in the global economy have made consumers increasingly disconnected from environmental responsibility and stewardship.⁶

Concerted actions to address these interconnected crises have so far been insufficient. Avoiding ecosystem degradation and rehabilitating or restoring degraded land and soil are cost-effective responses that can safeguard biodiversity and improve rural livelihoods while reducing the growing environmental risks to our societies, economies, and the natural world.⁷

1. Delivering on mandates for collaboration and joint implementation

The overarching objectives of both conventions include halting the degradation and loss of biodiversity habitat and intact ecosystems through the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of land resources in both natural and working landscapes.

Identifying commonalities between the mandates of the UNCCD and CBD is an important first step towards developing synergies for implementing these agreements at national and international levels. Coordination and collaboration between the conventions was a directive first established at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and subsequently reinforced in decisions adopted by Parties to both agreements – most recently during the 15th Conference of the Parties of the UNCCD and CBD held in 2022. For example,

- The GBF promotes coherence, complementarity, and cooperation between the CBD and other relevant multilateral agreements to contribute to and promote its implementation in a more efficient and effective manner, and
- UNCCD decision 8/COP15 acknowledges that the implementation of the UNCCD and efforts to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) benefit from strong and effective collaborations to leverage synergies with relevant organizations and international instruments, including the GBF.

To simultaneously achieve LDN and GBF targets, intranational coordination in the design and implementation of national strategies and action plans must be strengthened to realize complementary objectives. To facilitate this coordination, the convention secretariats and their partners are well positioned to support Parties with awareness raising, target setting, capacity development, partnership building, and resource mobilization – as well as to provide them with the practical tools and technical guidance to achieve shared goals and targets.

By including nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches in UNCCD and CBD decisions, countries have explicitly recognized the importance of integrated approaches to solve interconnected crises and have strongly demonstrated their readiness to explore synergies and collaboration to achieve common goals.

While the GBF contains a wide range of targets that encourage the recovery of land health and productivity in a nature-positive manner – such as reducing invasive species and pollution, repurposing harmful incentives, and enhancing stakeholder engagement, resource mobilization, and capacity building – this Synergy Brief focuses on those targets with the greatest potential for immediate action to enhance the synergistic implementation of both conventions.

Nature-based solutions

One significant area for synergies among the Rio conventions lies in the implementation of nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches, such as those that avoid deforestation and habitat loss as well as those that sustainably manage and restore degraded terrestrial ecosystems. These solutions and approaches, which also foster connectivity and resilience, require coordinated efforts at national and local levels where the mandates of the conventions are implemented.

- In March 2022, the UN Environment Assembly defined nature-based solutions as “actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use, and manage natural or modified ecosystems which address social, economic, and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience, and biodiversity benefits”.⁸
- In May 2022, UNCCD Parties agreed to “explore complementarities within relevant multilateral environmental agreements in the implementation of sustainable land management, ecosystem-based approaches, or nature-based solutions”.⁹
- In December 2022, CBD Parties adopted GBF targets 8 and 11 which envision the use of nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches in minimizing climate change impacts on biodiversity and for restoring, maintaining, and enhancing nature’s contributions to people.

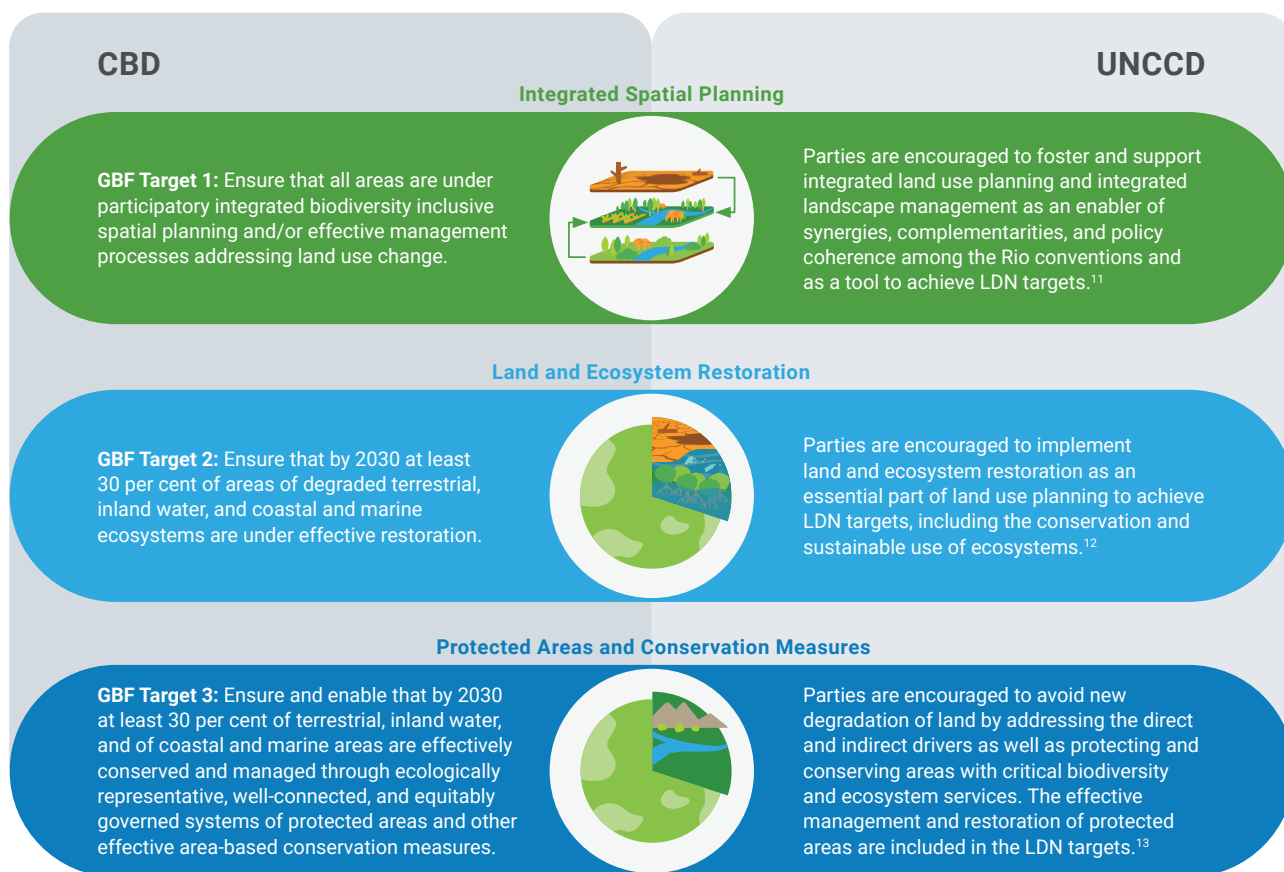
2. Catalysing effective and sustained action through area-based targets

Area-based environmental targets are effective in focusing the attention of policy and decision makers on spatially explicit, time-bound objectives that are well understood, actionable, and easily incorporated into policy and planning processes at all levels.

Goal A of the GBF states that “the integrity, connectivity, and resilience of all ecosystems are maintained, enhanced, or restored, substantially increasing the area of natural ecosystems by 2050”. GBF targets 1-3 mirror the LDN response hierarchy of measures to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation¹⁰ by ensuring that by 2030:

- (1) all areas are under integrated spatial planning,
- (2) 30 per cent of degraded land and ecosystems are under effective restoration, and
- (3) 30 per cent of critical biodiversity habitats are protected and conserved.

Figure 1 Joint implementation of area-based targets to safeguard biodiversity and livelihoods



Area-based targets shared by both conventions provide the operational nexus for closing the gap between the level of ambition and concrete actions on the ground. These targets offer the greatest potential for harnessing synergies, achieving multiple benefits, and mainstreaming land and ecosystem restoration across sectors and landscapes. Area-based targets can help facilitate joint actions that:

- (i) address the direct and indirect drivers of land degradation and biodiversity loss while minimizing economic trade-offs and the need for future ecosystem conversion;
- (ii) map and prioritize land conservation, sustainable management, and restoration initiatives based on national socioeconomic, environmental, and development priorities;
- (iii) provide a context-specific enabling environment for resource mobilization and broad stakeholder engagement; and
- (iv) harness the levers and means for implementing transformative policies, projects, and programmes within a distinct area and monitoring progress over time.

The participatory design and implementation of area-based interventions – endorsed by both conventions as part of an integrated landscape approach – offer significant potential for optimizing nature’s contribution to people while minimizing trade-offs with economic growth and sustainable development.

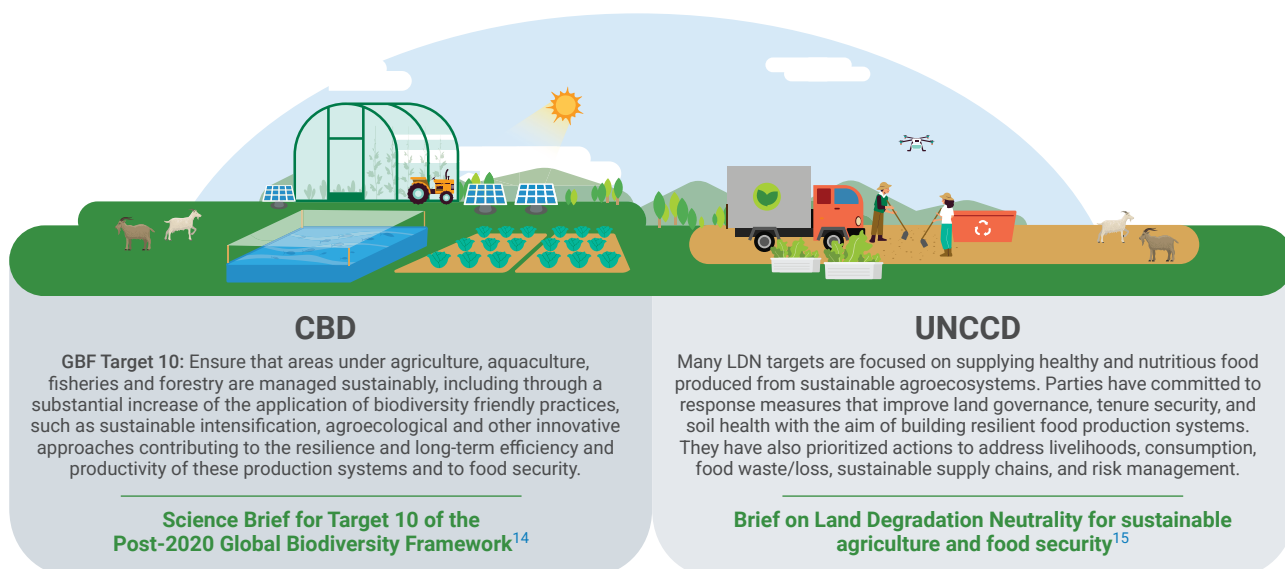
3. Scaling up sustainable agriculture to reduce and halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystems

The shared objectives of sustainable agricultural practices and resilient food systems can be pursued from a holistic and integrated perspective to minimize harmful incentives and fully account for biodiversity above and below ground.

Both conventions recognize that halting and reversing land degradation and biodiversity loss will be critical to meeting future demands for food, water, and other essential ecosystem goods and services. Many traditional and modern production practices can enable agriculture to pivot from being the primary cause of degradation to becoming the principal catalyst for land restoration. The greatest prospects for achieving food security, while addressing the climate, land, and biodiversity crises, depend on building and aligning human, social, and financial capital to address the drivers of degradation and restore soil health in agroecosystems.

Boosting yields on existing production lands – through biodiversity friendly, agroecological, and other innovative approaches to rehabilitate degraded and abandoned agricultural lands – can help reduce the pressure to destroy intact forests and other natural ecosystems for food, feed, and fibre. The wise use and management of scarce water resources through more efficient irrigation and storage technologies, combined with the conservation of vital crop varieties and the development of new drought-resistant ones, would contribute significantly to food and water security as well as more resilient local and regional food systems.

Figure 2 Regenerative agriculture practices to protect biodiversity and restore land resources



4. Promoting gender equality and secure tenure for sustainable land and water management

Gender inequalities, and their expression through violence and discrimination against women and girls, remain among the most persistent and egregious symptoms of human rights violations around the world.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acknowledge women's secure access to land can be a central component of social and economic empowerment by increasing the decision-making power and status of women within their communities and families. Both conventions have committed to an operational and forward-looking approach – including synergistic implementation with gender

plans or strategies developed under other relevant multilateral environmental agreements¹⁶ – to becoming more gender responsive in their efforts to achieve LDN and GBF targets.¹⁷ The Gender Action Plans of the UNCCD¹⁸ and CBD¹⁹ aim to ensure that gender equality plays a central role in all aspects of participation, decision making, implementation, and benefit sharing.

Figure 3

Gender-responsive approaches lead to greater equality and impact on the ground



In their decisions, UNCCD and CBD Parties explicitly recognize that gender equality and women's land rights are essential enabling factors needed for effective land restoration and for achieving LDN and GBF targets. For terrestrial ecosystems, there is wide scope for more responsible land governance and tenure security, inclusive and meaningful stakeholder participation, and improved access of smallholder land users to advisory and financial services.²³

In 2022, the UNCCD and FAO produced a technical guide on the integration of the voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries, and forests in the context of national food security into LDN and other land restoration initiatives.²⁴ The guide includes specific pathways that address the relationship between inclusive development, women's land rights, and sustainable use and management practices necessary for effective land restoration.

5. Recommendations for immediate action to realize enhanced synergies

Both the UNCCD and CBD are mandated to assist Parties in achieving transformative change for the benefit of people and nature through integrated approaches that employ sustainable land and water management policies and practices.

Most of the 130 countries currently pursuing LDN targets have already conducted biophysical assessments of land health and have identified resource needs and response measures that can directly support the achievement of many area-based and cross-cutting targets contained in the GBF. However, these LDN plans can be improved to offer a clearer awareness and mapping of the specific connections and operational complementarities with biodiversity conservation.

Now is an opportune moment for Parties and other stakeholders to both conventions to recognize and capitalize on the powerful synergies from joint policy design and implementation efforts. This is particularly important as the CBD Parties revise their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and formulate national targets in line with the GBF and as the UNCCD Parties strengthen their LDN targets considering their coherence and complementarity with the GBF targets.

Coordinated efforts for spatially explicit target setting

Parties and stakeholders of both conventions can work together to prioritize area-based targets to reduce and halt biodiversity loss and land degradation. Coordinated efforts to revise the NBSAPs and strengthen LDN targets can begin with the joint mapping of strategic intervention areas and corresponding response measures that can be implemented in an effective, complementary, inclusive, and mutually supportive manner. Ensuring that these targets are time-bound, spatially explicit, gender-responsive, and integrated into policy and planning frameworks will bring joint implementation work to the next level.

Intranational partnerships for design and implementation

Parties and stakeholders can establish national dialogues or other appropriate coordination mechanisms to bring together the conventions' different implementing bodies at the national level. Stronger institutional coordination between different ministries and between national and sub-national governments would help breakdown silos and ensure critical linkages. This may entail building on existing or creating new platforms to mobilize intranational partnerships, bring together commitments and finance to address overlapping challenges, and adjust relevant policy, legal, and institutional frameworks for enhanced cooperation among the conventions.

International capacity development and technical support

Parties can request support to ensure their strategies and action plans build on the cost-saving and implementation opportunities offered by integrated and biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning, coupled with more responsible and inclusive land governance. Clearly defined and enforced land rights, especially for women, youth, and indigenous peoples, empowers stakeholders to invest in the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of land resources. The convention secretariats and their technical partners are well placed to support countries in developing capacities and providing guidance and technical support to optimize interventions to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss as well as navigate the inevitable trade-offs resulting from competing demands for increasingly scarce land resources.

Project preparation and resource mobilization

Parties and donors can focus their investments on integrated and regenerative land-based projects and programmes that deliver co-benefits for biodiversity and livelihoods. Financing the critical land-biodiversity nexus through investments in, for example, regenerative agriculture and other nature-based solutions can increase synergies that benefit both rural and urban populations, leading to improved food and water security, climate mitigation, and poverty reduction outcomes. To leverage diverse funding sources and maximize returns on investment, concerted efforts should be made to “continue and intensify collaboration with relevant bilateral and multilateral funding mechanisms with a view to further catalysing synergies in project development and financing for the purpose of the objectives of the Rio conventions and the Sustainable Development Goals”.²⁵

Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting

Parties can use headline, global, component, and complementary indicators that are employed in existing processes, such as the SDGs, to the extent possible. Changes in the biophysical characteristics of terrestrial habitats are often the best proxy available to monitor pressures on ecosystems and biodiversity.²⁶ There are a number of well-established protocols and tools that can be used to monitor, evaluate, and report progress towards achieving LDN and GBF targets, including common approaches to track the implementation of area-based conservation, sustainable use, and restoration targets.²⁷

Endnotes

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SYNERGY BRIEF

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About UNCCD Synergy Briefs

Synergies are defined as a combined effect that exceeds the sum of individual effects. The potential for synergies is often discussed in the context of intersecting obligations contained in binding multilateral agreements and voluntary commitments in which land governance, management, and restoration feature prominently.

The linkages between the land degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change crises are clear. These challenges exacerbate each other with serious consequences for the health of our societies, ecosystems, and economies. Effective responses to these intertwined emergencies must include the conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems and land resources, including our soil, water, and biodiversity.

The Rio conventions (UNCCD, CBD, and UNFCCC), their protocols, agreements, institutional frameworks, and body of decisions – along with the Sustainable Development Goals – provide an actionable blueprint to realize a more resilient and sustainable future. Countries, communities, and corporations must work together to achieve agreed upon targets and build the capacities needed to respond and cope with global environmental change.

Essential first steps towards harnessing synergies include:

- recognizing that complementarities among agreements and commitments not only should be an integral part of the planning and implementation of each convention but should be adopted as policy and/or legal instruments and mainstreamed within national development and sectoral plans,²⁸ and
- strengthening national capacities to enhance coordination efforts and maximize returns on investments from the joint design and implementation of mutual goals and targets.²⁹

This series of Synergy Briefs produced by the UNCCD secretariat will explore actionable pathways to improve cooperation and coordination for the enhanced implementation of the Rio conventions and other multilateral agreements with the objective of supporting countries and other stakeholders to fulfil their respective commitments and obligations more efficiently and effectively.



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