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CSOs make a stance, and proposes additional criteria for the accreditation of Private Sector to the UNCCD - See page 2 CSOs statement on Agribusiness

Eco-newsletter has been published by Non-Governmental Groups at major conferences since the Stockholm Environmental Conference in 1972. This issue is produced by groups attending the UNCCD COP 11 in Windhoek, Namibia

Analysis of the 'UNCCD policy brief Zero Net Land Degradation – a sustainable development goal for RIO+20'

– DRYNET's contributions for reflection

In the 'UNCCD policy brief Zero Net Land Degradation – a sustainable development goal for RIO+20' (May, 2012) Zero Net Land Degradation (ZNLND) is defined by the UNCCD as "the achievement of land degradation neutrality, whereby land degradation is either avoided or offset by land restoration." Mr. Luc Gnacadja (Executive Secretary of UNCCD) puts it in other words: "Zero net land degradation means that we prevent the degradation of productive land and restore land that is already degraded." Zero Net Land Degradation and Land-Degradation-Neutral World (LDNW) as it was mentioned in the Rio+20 outcome document 'The Future we want' seem to be two similar concepts. In the COP11 en CST documents there are 47 references to ZNLND and/or LDNW e.g. see documents COP 2, COP 5 and CST 7-3. The definitions of ZNLND and LDNW concept are clear. However, the elaboration of the concepts is of concern, and is worrisome. Below are five points that can be used to elaborate of the concepts of ZNLND and LDNW.

What is the geographical unit that makes the 'zero net'? Should the land degradation of one ecosystem be zero? Is it so that within the ecosystem there can be a little bit of degradation of soils while at another side of the ecosystem there is the same 'amount' of restoration of the ecosystem? Thus is the total land degradation within an ecosystem zero?

Or is the 'measuring unit' the political borders of 1 nation state (and thus not the natural borders of ecosystems)? For example: does zero net land degradation make it possible to allow restoring forests while degrading dry-lands within the borders of the country? Can one area be traded-off against another area?

Or is the zero net land degradation a global calculation, so that the land restoration that takes place

in Mali can "neutralize" the land degradation of Malawi? If so, who is going to decide what the trade-offs are? And at what cost?

If the target is set at ecosystem and/ or national



The concern of CSOs: Already used as slogans, will the concepts of ZNLND and LDNW in the declaration "The Future We Want" Rio+20 be viable? Under what conditions

level, then will it only bring additional obligations to affected countries? What will be the obligations of other signatory states? What are the characteristics of restored/ degraded land that are allowed under the zero net land degradation concepts?

What is the benchmark or starting point of ZNLND? What is the operational definition of land degradation and restoration? How are land degradation and land rehabilitation measured? Is the starting point the status of the current 'geographical unit' (ecosystem, nation state, world) that are already degraded, or is the starting point

the status of the pre-land degraded ecosystem/ nation/ state? The first one might be measurable; the last one promotes restoration actively.

ZNLND creates the illusion that ecosystems with their specific values, characteristics and services can be compared and traded-off against each other. ZNLND implies to introduce a 'market', like carbon markets, for degradation in one place and obligations or no choice for rehabilitating in another place.

Who is going to measure and monitor the rate of land degradation and land restoration? What is the unit of measure for land degradation? Is it per hectare or per square km? Will new indices apply to all countries? Who is going to measure and monitor land degradation and land restoration?

How do local communities, citizens and/or people participate in the decision-making over zero net land degradation initiatives/ strategies, about the whereabouts of these areas and the monitoring of these areas?

In conclusion

The ZNLND concept seems to be a very technical and calculative approach to stop land degradation. It is also a concept that is not fully developed. Solely focusing on counting mechanisms as an indicator for degradation and monetary stimuli for restoration might give insight on the restoration/ degradation status of an ecosystem, a nation state and/or the world. However, it will not tackle the indirect drivers for land degradation. These drivers are (1) sociopolitical dynamics as ambiguous land tenure systems that leave room for land grab; (2) poverty and inequality as participation of (poor) people in decision making regarding land use planning, policies and value chains; and (3) the

gap between academic science, technology, local knowledge and experience. A Zero Net Land Degradation concept (and for that matter a sustainable development target on ZNLD) that does not take care of these drivers will be a false solution, an empty slogan and will result in less consideration, responsiveness and funds for solid actions to control and stop land degradation.

From the DRYNET practice and experience, we suggest to not only focus on Zero Net Land Degradation and to develop a multiple strategy by:

Starting from female and male land users and their human rights;

Handling the drivers of land degradation, like unfair, ambiguous land tenure, inappropriate focus on large-scale and/or export-oriented agriculture, not fostering sustainable small-scale agriculture, lack of local and regional markets;

Cherishing the good practices by creating an enabling environment for 1) knowledge development and sharing for an agro-ecological approach to farming and livestock keeping by scientists, practitioners and land users, 2) good governance of tenure of land and forests, 3) organization of small-scale farmers and pastoralists, 4) low external input agriculture, including finance for small-scale farmers and 5) local food systems by access to local and regional markets.

Uranium Boom and Land degradation in Namibia

– Reflections by Earthlife Namibia

Namibia is the fifth biggest uranium producer and is striving to become the second biggest on the global uranium market. Uranium mining and exploration in Namibia is sometimes undertaken in protected national parks as well as on communal land. Under the Namibian law, prospecting and mining is even allowed in protected areas of the Namib Desert (the oldest desert in the world) – which are home to endemic flora and fauna. Mining is also done in communal land resulting in not only communities being deprived of grazing land for their animals, but also there are not adequately compensated for the loss of livelihoods.

Due to uranium mining huge tracts of land are rendered unusable for crop and animal production. Uranium extraction causes long-term contamination of surface and groundwater, soil, air, fauna and flora and loss of biodiversity. Rehabilitation of mine sites is a big challenge to government and mining companies.

Mining also creates huge amounts of radioactive waste rock and tailings which still contain 85% of the original radioactivity. Nobody knows how to manage these waste products for the long time as

they need to be managed for about 100 000 years.

Earthlife Namibia would like to make the following policy recommendations:

1. Mine closure plans and funds for rehabilitation of uranium mining sites must be a prerequisite to obtain a mining license.
2. Legal provision for a proper public participation process must be in place and compensation for the loss of land must be paid to all effected people including indigenous and traditional communities.
3. Although Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are almost everywhere required, they are of various qualities. EIAs should be reviewed by independent experts and not only by the governmental bodies.
4. Uranium mining must not be allowed in National Parks in all countries.

Why welcome the drivers of land degradation as observer to the UNCCD?

– Say no to agribusiness!

Civil society is not against the observer status of private sector, if they demonstrate a clear and transparent commitment to advancing sustainable development. However, civil society is very concerned that Parties are welcoming agribusiness companies as UNCCD observers despite knowing their notorious record of undermining farmers' resilience and driving land degradation.

Agribusiness companies are monopolizing our genetic resources. Their patents for hybrid and genetically engineered seeds prevent poor farmers from saving, exchanging, using and selling seeds



that they have produced themselves. When farmers adopt these seeds promoted by agribusiness, the genetic variety of traditional seeds, adapted to unpredictable local conditions in drylands, is endangered, and may be lost forever.

As the seeds are patented, farmers need to buy them every year. The patented seeds often come in a two-in-one package with chemical pesticides, and require fertilizers to provide economic yields. These external inputs are expensive, and over the years

the prices have steadily increased because only a handful of companies control the agribusiness industry. A tradition of farmer selection of well-adapted seed varieties that dates back 6,000 years is being destroyed in just a few decades.

If crops fail, the farmers easily become trapped in a vicious circle of poverty. However, by branding their patented crops as 'climate ready' or 'drought resistant', these agribusiness companies are making billions in profits. In truth, the seeds are not engineered to respond to varying climatic conditions over time in drylands, but for maximum short-term financial gains under controlled conditions. In addition, the pesticides promoted by agribusiness destroy crucial microorganisms and affect the nutrient cycle in the soil, prevent natural regeneration of the soils resulting in continuous land degradation.

Large agribusiness companies claim to respond to the challenges in drylands, but the evidence shows that they are contributing to the loss of agrobiodiversity, land degradation and poverty of local communities. This has devastating effects for food security, human health and resilience of local communities.

The Parties to the Convention and Observers have always been united by a common desire to mitigate the effects of land degradation on people and their livelihoods. Profit has not been the primary motive behind the promotion of Sustainable Land Management technologies and approaches that promote sustainable livelihoods in the global drylands. We believe that the willingness to welcome any and all private companies that are members to the global compact to the Convention without considering their ethics and the impact of the technologies that they promote will have disastrous results.

Supporting the right of all people to food and seed sovereignty, civil society asks:

1. Agribusiness companies: What is your incentive to join the UNCCD? What are you doing to prevent land degradation?
2. UNCCD Parties and the Secretariat: What is the contribution of agribusiness companies to the objectives of the UNCCD?

Be sure to offset your UNCCD COP 11 travel by supporting a Namibian community solar project.

24 volunteers have already offset their COP11 travel by 16 Sept. When will you participate?