

INDIA GEARED UP FOR SETTING AMBITIOUS NATIONAL TARGETS TOWARDS ACHIEVING LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY AND SDG 15.3

05th December, New Delhi: The first National Workshop on Land Degradation Neutrality – Target Setting Programme (LDN-TSP) jointly organized by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification India (UNCCD) concluded here on Wednesday. After successfully hosting Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on capacity building on UNCCD reporting early this year, this two-day national expert group workshop was organized on 4-5th December 2018 in New Delhi, to set the national Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets. Over 60 participants including senior policy makers, national stakeholders including governmental agencies at the national and state level, research institutes, civil society organizations, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector participated and contributed towards developing the national strategy for LDN.

In his opening remarks Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD, Dr. Pradeep Kumar Monga emphasized the opportunity to use LDN to foster coherence of national policies, actions and commitments, aspire for transformation by creating innovative blended finance packages. During the inaugural session Mr. Pravin Garg, Additional Secretary & Financial Advisor, MoEFCC, emphasized on need for local action to meet global approach and proposed for the competitive model to reward champions amongst states for achieving land degradation targets. UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Yuri Afanasiev mentioned that as land is the most valuable product for India, setting national LDN target will ensure political commitment and that it is low hanging fruit- which brings in economic opportunity for India- achieving multiple benefits while creating job opportunities. Joint Secretary, MoEFCC & National Focal Point for UNCCD in India, Mr Jigmet Takpa accentuated the importance of a multi-pronged cohesive effort in combating challenges arising from risks of deteriorating land setting in the country.

Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) is defined 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”. The participants also comprised of the LDN working group that contributed towards developing the national strategy for LDN. On the first day there were technical sessions on LDN baseline, hotspots, formulation of LDN targets, institutional and inter-sectoral linkages/ need for policy integration on land and means for implementation which is all inclusive including gender and land tenure, as well as the economics of land degradation were discussed. The second day focused more on prioritization of LDN transformative projects and programs (TPP) and innovative Financing Opportunities for LDN (e.g. green investment, private sector, institutional investors, social impact investment, blended finance, reclamation of mines). Several renowned national experts chaired various sessions as Mr K S Popli, CMD Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA); Dr N P Singh, Senior Expert, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO); Mr Atul Bagai, Country Head, UN Environment; Dr S.G Tembhornikar, APPCCF (Maharashtra), as well as senior officials from State Government Departments and Central Government. Key technical presentations by NRSC, SAC, NABARD, Ministry of Mines, TERI, FAO, IUCN, UNEP, Gram Bharti Samiti, ATREE, LDN National consultant, IREDA, NBSS-LUP, MoEFCC and UNCCD were also made during the Workshop.

In the closing session, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD, Dr. Monga highlighted on the opportunities for greater synergies in the three Rio conventions (UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD) while developing transformative projects. Additional Secretary, MoEF&CC, Mr. A.K Jain in his closing remarks, highlighted the strong link of Land in the Energy-Food-Water Nexus. He mentioned that LDN has strong potential to contribute towards achieving national vision for e.g. doubling the income of farmers. He mentioned that with the corporate environmentalism evolving fast in India, there are growing array of funding options and mechanisms which should provide unique opportunity for financing transformative land degradation neutrality projects and programmes. Mr. Jigmet Takpa delivered the vote of thanks and appreciated the coming together of stakeholders for this consultative start to India's effort to achieve LDN targets by 2030.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15.3 "By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world" is the foundation on which future course of action will be based. India has shown a strong commitment to sustainable land management with a focus on combating land degradation and desertification. Addressing land degradation and desertification issues is critical in India given the fact that almost half of population derive their income from farm related and allied agriculture activities. The goal of reducing poverty and facilitating livelihoods; securing food, water and energy security and reversing land degradation and desertification are closely linked in India.
