

Implementing SDG 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality in the EU and EU Member States

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The continuing degradation of land and soils is a severe threat to the provision of ecosystem services and economic development. Sustainable use of land and soils are therefore an integral part of the “Agenda 2030” with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015. The SDGs provide new opportunities for an ambitious and integrated environmental policy worldwide and in the EU. Among the many relevant targets that directly or indirectly address soils (such as goals on zero hunger, well being, clean energy, climate change, water and sustainable cities), target 15.3 that aims to achieve “a land degradation-neutral world” by 2030 is the most relevant.

The concept of “Land Degradation Neutrality” (LDN) is not only about halting the loss of healthy and fertile land, but also actively reversing degradation by restoring land in order to counterbalance losses that cannot be avoided. It is a very ambitious target but due to a lack of balancing mechanisms for degradation and restoration in most countries also a new concept. Land Degradation Neutrality therefore both needs a scientific conceptual framework as well as a political debate about its implementation and development of instruments. In the EU and its Member States, this debate can also serve as a catalyst to revive the discussion on a common soil policy in Europe after the withdrawal of the proposal for a soil framework directive in 2014.

To analyze options for the implementation of target 15.3 in Germany and Europe the research project “Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals on Soils in Germany” (<http://ecologic.eu/12876>) is currently carried out by the Ecologic Institute on behalf of the German Environment Agency (UBA) and the German Federal Environment Ministry (BMUB).

The project will run until spring 2017 and the session “European Environmental Policies and Sustainability” at the EGU will be an ideal opportunity to present the final outcomes of the project and give participants an overview of this very dynamic political process and its science policy interface.

Specifically, the presentation can provide an overview about two key results of the project:

A) Steps and guiding questions to implement LDN on a national level for policy makers (including a reflection about key definitions and concept)

B) Appropriate indicators for LDN (with a special focus on Land Use Change)

The results are based on a literature review, more than 50 international expert interviews and discussions within two German workshops and one international workshop (that brought together 15 EU Member State representatives, EEA, UNCCD and the European Commission) to discuss the political options to implement LDN. The results also build on the extensive work that the UNCCD and the global Target Setting Programme have conducted to further develop and define the concept of land degradation neutrality.

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