

## Both ENDS

### This document

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# GROUNDING SUSTAINABILITY LAND, SOILS AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

*In recent decades, the issues of soil and land have been raised on international policy agendas. Land users' struggles with soil degradation, erosion and drought resonate increasingly at the international policy level. In 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the aim of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all, while "Leaving No One Behind".*

The SDGs take a holistic approach to simultaneously advancing social inclusion, environmental sustainability and economic development. Each SDG has specific targets to be achieved by 2030, and indicators which measure progress. Nine SDGs affect land and soil management, and hence agricultural productivity and environmental resilience and sustainability. The 193 UN Member State governments are responsible for integrating the SDGs into their national and foreign policies, e.g. trade and investment, although the SDGs are not legally binding. Land users, such as farmers and pastoralists, the private sector, civil society and academics all have a role to play too.

### Implications of the nine land use related SDGs for different stakeholders

- **Policy makers** have a major opportunity to help achieve these SDGs by promoting a range of policies, improved governance and policy coherence for inclusive, participatory land use planning, Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and sustainable management of land and soils. These measures have the potential to deliver multiple 'wins' for policy makers. However, in many countries there is a challenge in securing land (use) rights as policy makers may have to deal with entrenched national and international interests. Policies on access to agricultural land and security of tenure will have to be addressed, where these are inhibiting improvements in soil health and management for sustainable levels of production. In order to "Leave No One Behind" securing political space and financial support for the less powerful land users is imperative in this process.
- **Land users** can contribute to the SDGs, but this is likely to happen only in a context where it makes common sense for a land user to invest in long term, sustainable land use and management. The changes required to realise this context will differ from one country to another. Governments may need to introduce and uphold stronger laws (e.g. on land use change, security of tenure, disposal of wastes and use of agrochemicals); provide advisory and extension services on sustainable land and soil management; and offer financial support to land users (both women and men) to change to sustainable practices.
- **Private sector** companies and financial institutions in land dependent sectors, such as agribusiness, forestry, renewable energy, extractive industries, infrastructure and tourism will find that "business as usual" will have to change to meet the SDGs. Not all companies will welcome policy initiatives designed to encourage sustainable use of land and natural resources.



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- **Civil society** can find in the SDGs a platform which helps to address critical aspects of land governance and soil management. When governments ensure a solid civic space, civil society will be able to support land user communities, monitor progress of the SDGs, hold governments accountable, and engage the private sector in inclusive sustainable land use.
- **Academics** can contribute to improved SDG implementation based on sound research through developing and sharing knowledge, and tracking and monitoring the progress of the SDG targets and indicators.

### Key Messages

**Responsibility** for achieving the SDGs lies primarily with national governments, through their policies, development plans and financial tools. Good land governance, participatory land use planning, sustainable use of land and soils and meaningful involvement of communities are critical for achieving the SDGs. This presents both challenges and opportunities.

**Multiple gains:** SDGs offer governments a strong, integrated framework for progressive reforms to land and soil management that can achieve multiple policy objectives, including mitigating the effects of climate change.

**Competing claims:** Pressures on land for food, fodder, fibre, timber, renewable energy, buildings and infrastructure, caused by both domestic demographic and consumptive change and international trade and investments, mean that policies prioritising certain SDGs will create “winners” and “losers”. Governments face the crucial task of managing these trade-offs in a way that will advance sustainable use of land and soil, and “Leave No One Behind”.

**Governance:** In some countries the land sector is characterised by weak governance, political patronage, corruption, impunity for powerful elites, ineffective judicial systems and weak enforcement of existing laws and international policies, like ILO convention 169 for indigenous and tribal people, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), the UN Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGTs). Trade partner countries and donors have often shied away from engaging in land rights issues while they too have responsibilities to act as agreed in OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises, the UNGPs, the VGGTs. Addressing these governance issues by governments, trade partner countries and donors will be crucial for achieving the many SDG targets with strong land components.

**Monitoring progress:** all SDG targets have indicators to track their progress, both domestically and internationally. However, some indicators still lack defined methodologies and/or readily available data, e.g. regarding gender and tenure security. New geospatial technologies and participatory data collection and sharing provide possibilities to fill these gaps.

**Stakeholder participation:** the greatest impetus for improving land governance and achieving sustainable management of land and soils is the engagement with and participation of multiple stakeholders with a shared commitment. It requires broad alliances to break down the obstacles to sustainable land governance and use, halt unsustainable land use and communicate the importance of land related policies and actions, while agreeing on a clear set of rules and goals.



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