



Project evaluation: Summary report

Supraregional: Sector Project to Combat Desertification

Project no.:	2014.2246.8
CRS purpose code:	31130 Agricultural land resources
Project objective:	German development cooperation uses innovative strategies to help achieve the objectives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
Project term:	June 2014 to May 2017
Project volume:	EUR 6,340,000
Commissioning party:	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Lead executing agency:	Not relevant because this is a supraregional sector project
Implementing organisations (in the partner country):	Not relevant because this is a supraregional sector project
Other participating development organisations:	European Union
Target groups:	The rural population in arid regions in the partner countries, which is at risk from desertification. These people are particularly hard hit by poverty and the impacts of climate change. Desertification processes jeopardise their natural bases for production (soil, water and biodiversity) and result in food insecurity, the destabilisation of livelihood systems and an exodus from rural areas. Women typically have a limited say and few decision-making powers when it comes to distributing and using natural resources. Their access to production resources and funding opportunities is also restricted.

Project description

The economic and social ramifications of land degradation are primarily a threat to the livelihoods of the poor, rural population, especially in arid regions. The expansion of degraded land limits the ecosystem services provided by soil, water resources and vegetation. The loss of land productivity directly compounds poverty and goes hand in hand with a reduction in food security, a destabilisation of economic cycles and a growth in rural depopulation and migration.

A raft of pioneering international resolutions reflects the growing importance of land degradation and sustainable land management to development policy. The outcome document from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio+20) recognises the global dimension of land degradation and its social and economic costs. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underscore the relevance of soil as a resource (SDGs 2, 3 and 15) and contain their own target on land degradation neutrality (LDN; 15.3). A core concern of the United Nations Convention to Combat

Desertification (UNCCD) thus found its way into the debate surrounding the SDGs. Germany ratified UNCCD in 1996 and is working both politically and financially to support implementation as the country hosting its secretariat.

The object of this evaluation is the Sector Project to Combat Desertification, whose objective is: German development cooperation uses innovative strategies to help achieve the objectives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The project is geared towards supporting achievement of UNCCD goals and raising the profile of the issues of land degradation and sustainable land management (SLM) in German development policy and in national policies in the partner countries of German development cooperation.

The project runs from June 2014 to May 2017 and works in three strategic fields of activity. Field of activity 1 aims to increase the capacity of BMZ to shape the national and international agenda on UNCCD and sustainable land management. The second field of activity aims to ensure that innovative sustainable land management approaches are used by selected partner countries of German development cooperation (DC). To this end, the project will prepare strategies, lessons learned and instruments to combat desertification and for sustainable land management in arid regions for further dissemination. The third field of activity is oriented towards improving the general conditions in selected partner countries, embedding measures and policies to avoid and compensate for land degradation and mobilising funding to disseminate sustainable land management. Running the Secretariat of the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative is also an important element in depicting the economic effects of land degradation. Working across sectors is a key aspect of the strategic approach. All fields of activity thus incorporate measures that make contributions to the objectives of the other Rio Conventions on climate change and biodiversity and to the international dialogue on forest policy through sustainable land management.

The module objective's level of ambition is appropriate and the strategy adopted by the project is coherent both in terms of approaches within the fields of activity and their combination and interaction in order to reach the module objective. Each of the three fields of activity works on a different level. The findings and lessons learned from the second and third fields of activity are incorporated into advisory services for BMZ.

Two modification offers making minor adaptations to the strategy were submitted during the course of project implementation. The result in field of activity 3 was widened slightly in July 2015 within the scope of cofinancing from the EU. The functionality of the ELD network was also added as an independent output. The second modification offer dated January 2016 added further capacity development measures in partner countries in order to leverage the ELD results and establish local capacity to conduct ELD-related research and advisory services. Moreover, new opportunities were harnessed with additional complementary support from LDN pilot measures in DC partner countries. These additions are coherent since they safeguard achievement of the outputs based on new opportunities, thereby helping to achieve objectives.

No explicitly formulated results hypotheses are available for the sector project. Shortly before the project appraisal, the project did update a results model that illustrates the current state of affairs. However, the hypotheses that it shows are not always transparent, coherent and complete. The central hypotheses for the project were defined as follows during the project evaluation: the ELD network contributes to the development of capacity for the economic evaluation of land-based ecosystem services (Output D) at national, regional and international level, thereby creating better prerequisites and supporting arguments for considering SLM in financial plans and policies, as well as using innovative approaches in partner countries (link with Outputs B and C). At the same time, piloting innovative SLM approaches in partner countries is a promising approach to advance the consideration of SLM in policies, strategies and financial plans (link to Outputs B and C). The lessons learned at implementation level in fields of activity 2 and 3 are incorporated into advisory services for BMZ, which is thus able to become more effective in shaping the national and international agenda on UNCCD and SLM (link between Outputs B, C and D and Output A). In this closely interlinked form, these four project outputs contribute towards achieving the goals of UNCCD (link with the module objective/outcome). A hypothesis encompassing the entire project is that results can only be delivered by connecting international discourse with the national level and local implementation in keeping with the multi-level approach. Through the sector project, German DC makes a long-term contribution at the impact level to reducing land degradation and thus to food security, reducing poverty, protecting the climate and adapting to climate change, conserving biodiversity and increasing the resilience of rural livelihood systems.

Three of the four module objectives indicators and another indicator originally formulated for an output were used to assess effectiveness. The fourth module objectives indicator, which was not considered, does not comply with SMART criteria: it is not relevant since it does not relate to the module objective, but rather to knowledge of the project's services.

Furthermore, it is not specific. The three other indicators were slightly amended for the purposes of the evaluation, both to make them specific and so that new developments in DC can be taken into account.

The evaluation of the impact criterion is based on the targeted overarching results, as detailed in the programme proposal. On the one hand, this concerns the statements about the impact criterion made as part of the presentation of development effectiveness and information on awarding the following markers: i) gender equality: the principle of gender equality is embedded in the design of innovations and strategies, ii) adaptation to climate change: the project helps to protect production resources for agriculture, forestry and pasture farming and thus enables economic development in arid regions, iii) poverty orientation: with its measures, the project makes an indirect contribution towards preserving natural resources for the poor rural population in arid regions and iv) the cross-cutting issue of human rights: the project makes an indirect contribution towards implementation of human rights by protecting endangered resources, especially in terms of the right to food. In selected countries, it helps to foster cross-sector policy-making processes when combating desertification and land

degradation by involving the local population in decentralised planning and implementation processes. The analysis of scaling up and the potential for broad-based impact provided another basis for assessing the impact criterion.

Basis for assessment of the OECD-DAC criteria:	Individual and overall rating of the OECD-DAC criteria:
<p>To determine the TC measure's overall rating, calculate the average of the individual ratings of the five OECD-DAC criteria:</p> <p>14 – 16 points: very successful 12 – 13 points: successful 10 – 11 points: rather successful 8 – 9 points: rather unsatisfactory 6 – 7 points: unsatisfactory 4 – 5 points: very unsatisfactory</p>	<p>Relevance: 16 points - very successful Effectiveness: 13 points - successful Impact: 13 points - successful Efficiency: 13 points - successful Sustainability: 14 points - very successful</p> <p>Overall, the TC measure is rated very successful with a total of 13.8 out of 16 points.</p>

Relevance (Are we doing the right thing?)

The project's strategy and objective are based on the underlying ideas and updated strategies and objectives of UNCCD and hence on key concerns held by the United Nations. The Convention not only relates to physically combating desertification. In reality, out of the three international environmental agreements reached in Rio, UNCCD is the convention that is most heavily oriented towards development policy since it seeks to break the vicious circle of land scarcity, hunger, migration and resource conflicts, especially in the poorest countries. The development policy relevance of UNCCD has also increased during the project as LDN was added as a sub-goal for sustainable development (15.3). The project strategy's close connection with UNCCD's objectives is also reflected in its design through its clear focus on the core problems facing the target groups. The particular issues encountered by women were also analysed and presented. Women generally have a limited say and few decision-making powers when natural sources are distributed and used, as well as restricted access to production resources and funding opportunities. They are thus especially affected by the impacts of land degradation. The intensive discussion of the core problems facing the target group when the project was designed is also reflected in the targeted results, which present soil conservation as the foundation for rural development, poverty reduction and as a contribution to human rights. The project thus clearly aims to resolve a core problem facing the target groups.

Another important aspect pertaining to relevance is explicit cross-sector and cross-convention cooperation while taking account of the impacts on the climate and biodiversity. By running the Secretariat for the ELD Initiative, the project tackled an issue that was one step ahead of the international debate on the 2030 Agenda and today makes a highly relevant contribution towards several sub-goals of Sustainable Development Goal 15. The project also used new opportunities that emerged during the course of implementation and aligned itself with key international initiatives in the field. On the whole, the project's design is thus fully consistent with international issues, the 2030 Agenda and the international debate on soil conservation.

Sustainable land management has direct political and technical ties to German DC measures in the priority areas of the environment, climate change, rural development, agriculture and food security, water, biodiversity and forests. Sustainable land management is embedded as a strategic element in the BMZ strategy Promoting Sustainable Agriculture, the BMZ Ten-Point Programme for Rural Development and Food Security, and strategic guidance for German development policy on food security. BMZ is investing in the sustainable conservation and rehabilitation of soil used for agriculture in a variety of partner countries as part of the fifth action area within the Special Initiative One World, No Hunger. These central elements are also mirrored in the project's strategy and orientation. It thus fully complies with the German Government's basic development-policy orientation.

The relevance of the TC measure is rated very successful with 16 points.

Effectiveness (Will we achieve the project's objective?)

The module objective is: German development cooperation helps to reach the objectives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) by using innovative strategies.

Objectives indicator	Target value according to the offer	Current status according to the project evaluation
<p>1. Original indicator: Innovative sustainable land management approaches that contain explicit contributions to conserving biodiversity, protecting the climate and gender equality have been incorporated into four bilateral programmes.</p> <p>Adapted indicator: Innovative sustainable land management approaches that contain explicit contributions to conserving biodiversity, protecting the climate and gender equality have been incorporated into four bilateral TC measures or country-specific packages within global projects¹.</p>	<p>Quantity: 4 Quality: approaches contain contributions to conserving biodiversity, protecting the climate and gender equality.</p>	<p>Quantity: 4 Quality: One approach contains explicit contributions to conserving biodiversity, protecting the climate and gender equality.</p>
<p>2. The published results of the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) study are used in policy advice in the context of four bilateral and regional international cooperation projects.</p>	4	4 In two other countries, it can be assumed that the findings will be used for policy advice by the end of the project term.
<p>3. Local competence centres in at least two partner countries draw up strategic baseline studies² on embedding and implementing the objective of land degradation neutrality.</p>	2	2

¹ The addendum 'or country-specific packages within global projects' was incorporated during the evaluation to measure effectiveness. This amendment was made so that global projects that did not yet exist at the start of the project term could be taken into account.

² All documents drawn up as part of the LDN pilot project were defined as the basis for assessment within the parameters of the project evaluation, such as planning documents, baselines or an ELD study.

<p>4.</p> <p>Original indicator: 75% of relevant experts (representatives of German development policy NGOs and institutes) are aware of eight new media products and training opportunities on the importance of soil conservation for economic and development policy.</p> <p>Adapted indicator³: Four BMZ contributions on the issue of land rehabilitation/soil conservation in the food security-poverty reduction-climate change nexus have been incorporated into the national and international discussion.</p>	4	8
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The evaluation team comes to the conclusion that objectives indicator 1 will probably be *partly* achieved and objectives indicators 2, 3 and 4 will be *fully* achieved by the end of the project.

Additional results that are not directly reflected in the indicators evaluated above include key stimuli for the international dialogue that thus influence the international agenda, for instance UNCCD by supporting the science-policy interface (SPI) or contributing to SDG 15.3 (LDN). One important result is the high level of familiarity with the ELD Initiative's results in which the secretariat provided by the project plays an important role. Moreover, a global network was created to connect policy-makers, academia and practice.

Central factors that helped to achieve these results are rooted in very good cooperation work within the project. It built bridges between academia, policy-makers and development cooperation practice at international level. For instance, the project has made a significant contribution towards overcoming a sectoral silo mentality by systematically unlocking synergies, creating ties and translating knowledge and lessons learned into practice. Connections were strengthened by having a strong presence on the international stage and simultaneously forging cooperative relations with DC practitioners at national level, creating benefits for all sides. The international discourse was enriched by specific lessons learned at national level. At the same time, the incorporation of the international debate provided new impetus and direction to several national processes. Implementation shortcomings lie in a not very systematic and explicit capacity development strategy. There is also still potential to make implementation more target-oriented and results-based.

No indications of unintended negative results emerged during the project evaluation.

The effectiveness of the TC measure is rated successful with 13 points.

Overarching development results (impact) (Are we contributing to the achievement of overarching development results?)

The SDGs underscore the relevance of soil as a resource (SDGs 2, 3 and 15) and constitute their own sub-goal on LDN (15.3). Global interest in LDN is reflected in 104 states having officially stated their intention to formulate national LDN objectives by the time of the project evaluation. The project has influenced the methodology to be used for LDN by providing support for UNCCD and especially SPI (see Effectiveness). Moreover, experience was gathered that was incorporated into the international agenda through the transfer of the overarching SDGs to the national level. The project has thus helped to bring about a significant increase in the development policy relevance of UNCCD.

All told, it is increasingly recognised, even outside the expert dialogue, that soil conservation and sustainable land management play a central role in achieving food security, attaining climate change targets and combating the causes of migration. The project has also helped to make sure that the dimension of strengthening resilience is closely connected with the issue of soil and soil conservation in the international debate and development cooperation practice. It did so by strengthening the ties and synergies between soil conservation and climate change in BMZ's inputs, when designing DC projects and in the international debate (see Effectiveness).

By forging ties between the international and national level and local implementation, it also helped to integrate sustainable land management into DC with countries and regions and into resource management strategies in partner countries. Consequently, it has made an indirect contribution towards conserving natural resources for the poor rural population in arid regions and beyond. The land endangered by desertification offers a livelihood for many people, especially for their food security, and is the foundation for sustainable development. The project has thus raised the awareness of the

³ Originally output indicator A 2 in the programme proposal

importance of sustainable land management for fighting poverty and food security and identified the potential for economic development in arid regions. The project also plays an indirect part in implementing human rights, especially the right to food, by protecting endangered resources.

The development policy significance of soil as a central resource has increased because of the work of the sector project, both in the international agenda and in national policy processes.

The convention approach explicitly calls for the extensive participation of women when making decisions about resource management and improving their livelihoods. The project has also indirectly contributed towards the principle of gender equality by strengthening the convention and its implementation. However, this principle was not clearly enshrined, strengthened or implemented in the project in terms of its innovations, strategies or other contributions. The potential to make a contribution to overarching objectives is thus largely, but not completely, exhausted.

Altogether the project has improved the prerequisites for scaling up innovations and for broad-based impact. On the one hand, the tangible lessons learned and thematic ties between soil and related topics such as climate change and biodiversity in the international debate were essential in this work. Improved structural conditions thanks to the creation of new networks (ELD), strengthening existing networks and the bridges and ties that the project strengthened between policy-makers, academia and DC practice as well as between the different levels (local, national and international) are also conducive to scaling up. Additionally, the results generated during the ELD Initiative offer key economic arguments, and the project's contributions to the International Year of Soils in 2015 create good prerequisites for scaling up.

The impact of the TC measure is rated successful with 13 points.

Efficiency (Are the objectives being achieved cost-effectively?)

By the time of the project evaluation, the sector project deployed almost EUR 4.5 million in resources. A little over half of this sum went on personnel costs, with almost one third earmarked for financial contributions. The intense use of financial contributions reduced the project's ability to directly manage individual sums since this instrument is not connected with inputs to be provided by the recipient. However, it allowed a large number of actors to be included and sometimes mobilised entire organisations and networks, so that the value of benefits in some cases significantly outweighed the resources used by the project. Altogether the resources deployed by the projects are appropriate; two elements had minor potential for improvement. Although the individual fields of activity were implicitly conducted in a results-based manner, results-based monitoring complying with all GIZ quality standards was not performed for the entire sector project. Just one monitoring table was drawn up with the results of the individual indicators. Moreover, roles and responsibilities were not adequately clarified in the context of managing the ELD Initiative and the ELD Secretariat. This also meant that the steering group for the ELD Initiative never systematically analysed the findings and results, compared the required resources for the secretariat or even performed coherent strategic planning.

The sector project works with a large number of relevant actors in the field and in related areas. Cooperation took place in different forms (e.g. financial contributions, co-production of findings, exchange of experiences and networks) with a broad spectrum of different partners (e.g. international, regional, national, local, state, civil society, forums, policy-makers, academics and DC practice). This cooperation was exemplary.

The efficiency of the TC measure is rated successful with 13 points.

Sustainability (Are the positive results durable?)

The core concerns of the sector project - the importance of sustainable land management and reducing land degradation - are enshrined in the SDGs (15.3). The resulting increase in the relevance of UNCCD also mean that there are good prospects for the sustainability of the results already achieved in this context. German DC's strong portfolio also offers good prerequisites for the continued existence of synergies between sustainable land management issues and the related topics of the climate, biodiversity, forests and wood for energy generation. Successful products and lessons learned by the wood for energy generation working group have also created good conditions for mainstreaming results within GIZ, although they are not fully safeguarded in institutions.

Good conditions are also in place to ensure that the results of the ELD Initiative, which is particularly driven by the high level of international attention, are sustainable. However, further efforts for the broad use and integration of the results into policy processes are contingent on further financing and key factors at national level in the respective country. Moreover, there is a need for capacity development, connection with SDG 15.9, knowledge management and communication of lessons learned and results, which cannot be met by follow-on measures alone. There is an additional need for support for the ELD network, for the acquisition of additional partners⁴ and funding. Another factor is the staffing situation for the ELD Initiative, which is relatively heavily dependent on the knowledge and dedication of individuals.

⁴ The ELD Initiative has so far been financed by BMZ, the EU and, to a lesser extent, by South Korea.

Key results with better prerequisites for sustainability have been achieved by building bridges between the levels, 'worlds' (academia, policy-making, the private sector and practitioners) and sectors and by integrating sustainable land management into the international agenda and processes. However, further support is needed in some cases. Germany's specific contributions to the international agenda and in the context of UNCCD require the existence of the sector project; sustainability is not desired here.

The sustainability of the TC measure is rated successful with 14 points.

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