



## Land and Ecosystem Degradation and Desertification: Assessing the Fit of Responses



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# LEDDRA Policy Conference – Results from working round tables (17 March 2014)



## **Working table 1: Roles and opportunities to alleviate LEDD at community and regional levels**

**Facilitator: Claire Kelly (University of Plymouth) and Jane Brandt**

### **What were the main / most important topics discussed at your table?**

There was felt to be a general lack of power at the local level which hampered stakeholders' ability to take action themselves to change things and prevented them from taking steps to manage their own risks in the most appropriate way for local conditions. The demands and vicissitudes of global markets contributed to this sense of powerlessness. Also key here was the real and common problem of conflicting policies (i.e. renewable energy policies conflicting with rural development and agricultural policies), which caused major headaches for local administrations, who were often powerless to resolve these issues because decisions were made and lobbying undertaken at national level without local consultation.

The system was felt to be 'fractured' with individual needs and issues taking precedence over the collective or common good. Individual desires and freedoms are privileged above the needs of the environment. Things didn't used to be like that but have become that way in the recent past.

Communication and knowledge flows were problematic between and across all spatial levels. The current system is not well understood; decisions are made at a distance with little understanding of specific local contexts and conditions. There was also a lack of understanding at the local level as to how specific decisions were arrived at (i.e. a lack of understanding of the process AND the reasoning behind key decisions).

There is a distinct disconnection between the national and the local (regional/community) levels which causes problems for local stakeholders and decision-makers. There is also a lack of connection of local knowledge between generations – young people move away and don't learn key local environmental knowledge. New people move in who don't have locality-specific environmental knowledge.

Long-term solutions and perspectives are difficult when policy cycles (and elections) are very definitely short-term. This causes a mismatch between ecosystem needs and political needs and means that it is very difficult to implement longer-term solutions to LEDD issues.

### **Diverse perspectives: Which issues were most controversial and why?**

Money (subsidies) tend to go to large absentee land-holders that are disconnected from the local/regional level - i.e. they do not manage the land, so most of the money goes to the few but does not benefit the local level or those who actually work the land and know it best.

There are poor relationships (communication and financial) between institutions and individuals between and across spatial levels.

Administrations are powerless to act because of the lack of 'listening' from institutions and those at higher spatial levels.

### **Was there anything said or discussed that really surprised you?**

The problems highlighted (and the solutions put forward) were all about people, not about LEDD issues. The discussion centred not on soil but on people, their land, power, and what they can and cannot do.

### **New pathways: Were there new or promising approaches / next steps or actions / ways forward / conclusions**

Solutions identified included creating opportunities to bring people together around the table to talk, understand other perspectives and find suitable local solutions, not top-down imposed solutions. Local Agenda 21 was suggested as a good model.

There is no 'one size fits all' solution to LEDD. Supra-national, national and regional administrations and policy-makers need to understand that and enable locally adaptive policy-making to happen, but with effective monitoring and risk assessment.

The language used by scientists needs to be 'translated' into locally understood language, and vice versa.

Collective management worked in the past but has broken down because of the more individualistic attitudes which currently prevail. Suggestions that we need to find a new 'collective management' type of approach to enable longer-term sustainable management to become possible.

Create space for new institutions and innovative solutions to emerge and develop.

### **Key points to remember**

- Policies DO conflict
- Communities are not static, they change
- Policy-making needs to enable local adaptations and policy learning should be a multi-way process (not linear top-down) across all spatial levels

## **Working table 2: Roles and opportunities to alleviate LEDD at national the level**

**Facilitator: Gianni Quaranta and Rosanna Salvia (MEDES)**

### **What were the main / most important topics discussed at your table?**

The lack of environmental policy integration has been recognized by all participants. The main reasons discussed were:

- Psychological problem: the word “environment” is perceived as constraints to the development. There is a need to increase awareness among the society and to stress the positive link existing between sustainable development and environment
- Institutional approach: The lack or the absence of spatial planning. Spatial planning can work as a platform to integrate policies.
- Soil functions/services approaches: using the soil functions and/or services as a way to promote integration among policies
- The national level is not the appropriate level to integrate policies because there is too much variability and also because there is no objectivity (a politician may choose/prefer one region to another). Lower levels should be preferred.
- Lack of budget hampers the enforcement of environmental laws and increase awareness. Land degradation (as well as other environmental problems) are cross-cutting problems so there is the need to adopt an holistic approach and to have power to act.
- The answers to land degradation should not be only governmental but also involving society and private sectors.

### **Diverse perspectives: Which issues were most controversial and why?**

The most controversial issue was the possibility to “delete” the Ministry of Environment. The participants discussed a lot on that topic showing a dual position.

### **Was there anything said or discussed that really surprised you?**

None

### **New pathways: Were there new or promising approaches / next steps or actions / ways forward / conclusions**

- Use success stories as good examples
- Promote education at all level
- Adopt a Reactive approach (for examples national plans adopted by Australia, Namibia etc in combating climate change)
- Fix the amount of subsidies for the “greening” process within the CAP
- Consider land and water as an asset that contributes to the “value” of the products

- Involve land owners/land users in decision making
- Focus on organizations/unions when planning or promoting environmental laws/actions
- Link food security to sustainability of soil and water resources use
- Increase the price of food to encourage sustainable ways of production

**Key points to remember**

See above

## **Working table 3: Roles and opportunities to alleviate LEDD at the EU and international levels**

**Facilitator: Stephanie Wunder (Ecologic Institute)**

### **What were the main / most important topics discussed at your table?**

The discussion showed that participants agreed that there is momentum in the international policy arena to strengthen actions against LEDD. Among them are the Global Soil Partnership, activities of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) particularly with regard to their thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration, the Green Climate Fund and other funds to address adaptation to climate change through the restoration of soils. Since the food crisis of 2008 it became also clearer to the international community that the use of land and soil is not a national issue and responsibility – an argument that was and is often used to argue against international action for the protection of soil and land.

Current windows of opportunity to further strengthen the alleviation of LEDD are a new climate change agreement in 2015 and the formulation and implementation of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). As for the latter there is currently no explicit mentioning of a soils or land target, so the LEDDRA project outputs could also serve as a call for a land and soils target. Moreover, on EU level the follow up of actions around an alternative for the EU Soil Framework Directive may provide a window of opportunity to engage in activities against LEDD.

### **Diverse perspectives: Which issues were most controversial and why?**

Controversial discussion however took place how these opportunities can be used, what role the EU/ international level plays in comparison to local actions and what new approaches may be needed to avoid mistakes being made in the past. For example, while participants agreed on the need to better involve local needs, local knowledge and local participants/ civil society, there is the dilemma of time consuming participation processes and the need for policy action in the short run. A two tier approach that strengthens bottom up initiatives (even if they may become effective in the medium and long term) therefore seems most promising to the participants. This is even more important as whatever can be commonly agreed on the international level needs to be interpreted and diversified according to local needs: There is no one size fits all. Last but not least it was also discussed controversially what (positive) impact international policies to address LEDD had so far, also in comparison to the efforts invested.

### **New pathways: Were there new or promising approaches / next steps or actions / ways forward / conclusions**

There was the call to involve society much more than currently as the fundamental drivers of land degradation are in most cases social issues that need to be addressed by inclusive and non sectoral policies (land abandonment, migration etc.). This relates also to (land) resource intensive consumption – if addressed in a sectoral manner; LEDD problems shift regionally but do not disappear (indirect and direct land use change through demand for food, feed, fuel and material). A stronger involvement of civil society can also be beneficial to address the often stated lack of data about land and soils – as new IT solutions, smartphones and other technologies would allow tapping the potential of crowdsourcing of regional soil and land data.

## **Working table 4: Awareness raising and knowledge exchange to alleviate LEDD**

**Facilitator: Alexandros Kandalepas (University of the Aegean)**

### **What were the main / most important topics discussed at your table?**

- Awareness, knowledge, information are inseparable from extension services, and need to be established at the ground level (community, farm)
- Extension services working at the ground level in EU-Mediterranean countries were heavily criticized. The most crucial problem is their focus on fund administration and absence from the "field" (literally). Doubt is cast on employees' / agronomists' possibility to offer meaningful advice.
- Positive examples from
  - Israel: government supported extension and advice services, highly technical, top-down information available at all times and seasons to all farmers, widespread acceptance by farmers
  - Germany: cooperatives offering training, advice, lectures etc. to their members.
- The importance of teachers, teacher training, need for technical/farmers schools (NOT universities)
- Peer-to-peer, farmer-to-farmer education recognised by most as the most effective knowledge transmission method.
- Farm visits / farm examples also very important
- Neighbours and networks, leaders, multipliers, cafes, churches, women's gossip as knowledge channels are more effective than leaflets, writing etc.
- Information most necessary for farmers (demanded by them) is not on erosion, desertification, but more on pricing, marketing and technology options.

### **Diverse perspectives: what issues were most controversial and why?**

- Academics / farmers: "we know, but the other side will not listen"
- Large "knowledge", "technical support" failures have been well documented: e.g. attempts by western-trained agronomists to introduce European-style grazing in Morocco failed due to not considering cultural property arrangements and local flora and fauna balance in fragile rangelands,
- Farmers: There is awareness of measures at the lowest level (e.g. water management), but central advice and regulations often make it worse or remove possibilities to address LEDD as sometimes measures proposed by ministries lack practical considerations (e.g. fire management generally banned although might be preferable to tilling)
- Bottom-up approach is generally seen as most effective and preferable. But also possibility for top-down (e.g. Israel) extension and information services for farmers. This top-down approach was applied to new farmers with no farming history.
- The loss of knowledge is seen as irreplaceable - and knowledge may go down to the level of the individual olive tree

### **Was there anything said or discussed that really surprised you?**

Heavy criticism of extension, advisory and training services in the EU CAP, despite the universally recognised need for such actions

## **New pathways: were there new or promising approaches / next steps or actions / ways forward / conclusions?**

Difference in approach regarding to holding size:

- Promising examples from Spain and Italy involving collaboration of small landowners to achieve environmental objectives on a great scale. Strong social and human components as part of the solution.
- Possibility of large farms to achieve the same effect and act as examples (Portugal)

Case study in Spain/France Pyrenees' cross-border cooperation for farming schools: Five shepherds work also as school teachers. It is a great success but the Regional Rural Development Programme (RDP) could not assimilate and/or expand the method due to their interpretation of eligibility requirements in the EU RD regulation. Surprisingly, other regional RD programmes have adopted and financed the method.

### **Key points to remember**

- The optimism of academics vs. the pessimism of farmers
- Budget-spending is not an effective indicator to measure effectiveness/success of policy and measures
- Language barriers exist
- Need for training is not always recognised, while the need for money is always an issue
- Not agreement on what constitutes a LEDD problem: e.g. land-use change is often not perceived as problem, as construction/tourism may provide socio-economic benefits.
- LEDD as a result of a "tidiness culture": often, practices like biomass removal or deep tillage are a result of a culture of "tidiness", "cleanliness" which might be misplaced or exaggerated in the context of working with the land. Availability of technical means supports this tendency through "technological overkill" as in the case of weed removal in olive groves.
- **TIME** is crucial and also a source of tension, change is slow, 5-7 years to begin to see LEDD reversal at plot level
- What is trickier is that what may seem like a solution in the short-term may bring about degradation in the long-term: the long-term impacts of application of manure on soil productivity was sighted as a case in point improves soil for first 2-3 years but then dramatically deteriorates
- There is awareness among the politicians but degradation horizons are much longer than political periods



## **Working table 5: Innovative financing opportunities to combat LEDD**

**Facilitator: Mark Schauer and Hannes Etter (ELD-Initiative)**



### **What were the main / most important topics discussed at your table?**

- Overlaps / contradictions between public and private interests
- Envisaged source of funding for sustainable land use management (SLM) and measures to combat LEDD
- How should acquired funds be utilize to satisfy different stakeholders and maximize impact

### **Diverse perspectives: Which issues were most controversial and why?**

- External funding in form of subsidies, which might produce dependencies of local population vs. internal fundraising, which must cater different interests
- Property rights systems must be aligned or included into the considerations. While mismatching property rights might trigger failures of funding schemes, financing mechanisms can substantially contribute to their success.

### **Was there anything said or discussed that really surprised you?**

- Many good examples were received during the discussions from different sectors and spheres of influence, originating from all over the world.
- Different groups of participants have agreed that economics have to be included into LEDD-discourse

### **New pathways: Were there new or promising approaches / next steps or actions / ways forward / conclusions**

- Public private partnerships have widely been accepted
- Governmental tools and approaches by the private sector could secure more flexibility, efficiency and participation
- The inclusion of the financial sectors was a promising approach, especially where institutional structures are sufficient.
- The link between climate change adaptation and LEDD-combat should be strengthened
- Localization of production chains
- Livelihood diversification can increase resilience and strengthen the economic and ecologic structures

### **Key points to remember**

See above