

## Newsletter: September 2015

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### Parliamentary hearings on climate change

By Candice Arendse

In the lead up to the Paris climate conference, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environmental Affairs hosted a two day public dialogue on climate change in Cape Town on 22 and 23 September 2015. The hearings provided a platform for South African civil society to give input into the country's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), to ensure that the perspectives of all impacted stakeholders are represented in the country's negotiation position.

Jackson Mphiwa Mthembu, chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, opened the meeting and introduced Maesela Kekane of the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), who highlighted the vulnerability of Africa to climate change impacts and the critical position of the South African government in the negotiations.

Presentations shared in the course of the meeting represented views from an extensive range of stakeholders which included academia, women's groups, religious leaders and small scale farmers. Reducing emissions was a focal point in many presentations and government was criticised for its lack of consistency and planning in actively reducing emissions.

*Photograph by Candice Arendse*



**Bobby Peek of groundWork presenting on behalf of his organisation**

Bobby Peek of groundWork highlighted the impact of current and future emissions on the health of the people of South Africa and emphasised the importance of Eskom’s responsibility to reduce emissions. Similar views on the increasing use of coal power stations and the role of Eskom and Sasol were shared by Highveld Environmental Justice, Earthlife Africa and the Centre for Environmental Rights. Hilton Trollip of the Energy Research Centre of University of Cape Town gave a passionate and positive presentation on the technical and economic feasibility of a low carbon society while highlighting that this can only be achieved if we remain within our current level of emissions.

Other areas that were addressed included capacity building in local government, unemployment, and the use of finance for addressing the impacts of climate change. A small-scale farmer from Phillippi highlighted the significance of soil conservation in mitigation and adaptation, and Deon Robbertze of the African Climate Reality Project emphasised the importance of climate change education in schools. Highlighting South Africa’s contribution in the G77+China and Africa Group of Negotiators, Tasneem Essop of WWF called on South Africa to be a champion for the most vulnerable.

The input given at the hearings is intended to contribute to improving South Africa’s INDC. The Portfolio Committee on Environmental Affairs, together with other climate change relevant committees, will use the contributions made over the two days to inform a report that will be presented to Parliament.

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## Land Degradation Neutrality and a new Fund to advance the concept

By Noel Oettlé

A new catch phrase, “Land Degradation Neutrality”, is being brought into play with increasing prominence, with the intention of using the concept to ensure continued ecosystem functionality, broadly speaking. Yet what it delivers potentially locks communities out of their own lands and ultimately provides a licence for unfettered degradation.

The rapid depletion of the world’s land resources has been a topic of increasing concern in the past decades. The statistics are daunting: the United Nations<sup>1</sup> estimates that 12 million hectares of land worldwide – an area half the size of the UK – is degraded every year to sustain our global economy. In light of burgeoning global populations and the impacts of global warming on agriculture, this is a major concern.

*Photograph by Noel Oettlé*



**Degraded land in the Northern Cape, South Africa**

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was adopted in 1994 to promote sound governance of land-based resources, and governments agreeing to the Convention undertook to involve local communities in planning and implementing sustainable land management interventions. Viewed as “Africa’s Convention”, the UNCCD failed to attract significant donor support, and in many signatory countries governments have failed to create conditions in which affected populations are enabled and empowered to manage the land resources on which they depend in more sustainable ways. According to a UNCCD publication<sup>2</sup>, “despite the twenty-year-long endeavours throughout the globe, the situation became worse”.

The concept of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) first gained credibility at the UNCCD COP10 in 2011, and subsequently a goal for LDN was agreed at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) the next year. Its most recent iteration is as a target for Goal 15<sup>3</sup> of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss”. The LDN-specific target is: “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”.

What exactly is meant by LDN? Based on the Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the follow-up to the outcomes of Rio+20: “Land Degradation Neutrality is a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources, necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security, remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems.”

On the face of it this is a compelling proposition. Governments commit to ensuring that the rate of restoration is at least of equal magnitude as the rate of degradation. Food production and ecosystems are maintained, thus also contributing to political and economic stability. However, at its worst this initiative could be seen as giving governments and powerful interests the right to degrade as long as they can rehabilitate an equivalent area elsewhere. The assumption appears to be that the area within which “neutrality” must be achieved is either the nation state or the natural borders of an ecosystem.

However, one ‘banked’ hectare might not be of the same quality as a hectare that is lost, and the services provided by the restored hectare may not be as valuable as that provided by the degraded land. The proposed voluntary reporting on LDN could become a meaningless exercise of manipulation of data to show a zero loss, when in fact productive resources are still diminishing.

Sound governance is a pre-requisite for sustainable land management, and has been strongly highlighted by civil society as a significant and dangerous omission in the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals. It will be of vital importance to articulate and adopt governance indicators related to land degradation and restoration, such as indicators for retention of rights of resource use when land is restored, indicators reflecting the perceived quality of life of affected land users, and indicators against which to assess the relevance and effectiveness of institutions for management of communal land.

Most importantly, in the context of the UNCCD the question of equity must be addressed. Achieving LDN should not be at the expense of the poor, who might lose access to land if it is “restored” in ways that increase its productive and economic value. When poor people lose access to land, many become economic migrants, adding to the pressures on resources and governance in nearby (and even distant) towns and cities. Article 4/2/c of the UNCCD obliges Parties to “integrate strategies for poverty eradication into efforts to combat desertification”.

Land Degradation Neutrality is a top-down concept, and even though it appears relatively harmless, it may prove the undoing of millions of people who make their living on land that others judge to be degraded. At this point rural South Africans are unaware of the concept or its implications.

### ***The Proposed LDN Fund***

In the White Paper on the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund (LDNF) published by the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD in June 2015, the cause of the problem is described as being a paradigm of “exploit-deplete-migrate”, which is seen as characterising the management of natural infrastructure. What is proposed is the establishment of a Land Degradation Neutrality Fund, which would facilitate investments that would enable as much land as is being degraded to be rehabilitated.



The vision articulated for the LDNF is: “Our vision is one where economic growth does not result in long-term net losses to the environment and society that will be borne by future generations. In a land degradation neutral economy, all ecological and social dimensions of operations are taken into account, negative externalities are minimised and rehabilitation mechanisms are at work”.

There is an interesting dissonance here between the characterisation of the cause as “exploit-deplete-migrate” (clearly this refers to the global poor and brings to mind displaced environmental refugees, many of whom are currently pouring into Europe), and the link to economic growth as the driver (despite the reality that growth-oriented economic activities such as mining, urban expansion and industrial development are inimical to sustainable land use). It is thus important to ask which aspect the LDNF seeks to address, and in what ways.

The White Paper is informed by the belief that “with the right incentives in place, a critical mass of private sector initiatives will rapidly emerge, grow to scale and become self-sustaining”. It promises that “under the right conditions, the returns from these investments will be huge”.

The Fund is envisaged as a “coordination platform” to leverage investments that would establish a framework to “ensure adherence to certain standards and alignment with investors’ demand(s)”. Whereas alignment with investor’s demands is prioritised, meeting the needs of traditional land users is not. The LDNF “... seeks to provide a structured portfolio through which private and public sector actors can engage”. The interests that are to be served by the creation of this Fund are clearly not those of the poor.

The Fund intends to support “a steady transition toward a land degradation neutral economy.” What sort of economy might this be? Apparently it is a neo-liberal one in which investors are enriched and the land is restored. It does not appear that the investments in restoration of the land are intended to directly benefit the poor, other than by providing them with employment opportunities, probably of the most menial type.

The Fund will “enable the scaling up of the many viable business models based on upgraded land that generate suitable financial returns while contributing to broader food, water and energy security goals.” In order to do so, it will establish a public–private partnership (PPP) among private institutional investors, international finance institutions and donors.

*Photograph by Noel Oettlé*



**Degraded land in South Africa**

In Africa investments of this nature have resulted in the alienation and proletarianisation of rural populations. People who have been resource users either become labourers or are displaced to other areas. This is supported by legal wording and perceptions held by government officials in many African countries that mean that community land is frequently classified as unused land or wasteland.

An example of this sort of “development” is the grant by the government of Cameroun of 73,000 hectares of land to SG Sustainable Oil. Affected communities were confronted by 'offers' to become involved in palm oil development, which were often accompanied by intimidation by government officials. Elites were ‘persuaded’ that the development would be in their interests. Some local Chiefs became proponents of the developments against the wishes of the majority of their communities and agreed to cede the land use rights of their people. As a result, conflict erupted within and between communities. With a 10 year tax exemption and a rental of only USD1.00 per year for the land, the investors have an opportunity to reap vast profits, whilst there is little benefit to either the local communities or the national treasury. Not only have land users’ rights been negated, but the environment has been very negatively impacted by the clearing of forest to plant endless hectares of palm oil. This is one of many examples of how corporates have adopted the language and concepts of sustainable development to maximise profit.

Further examples come from Ethiopia, where the establishment of 100,000 hectares of sugar cane in the valley of the Awash River, on land that had been used by Afar pastoralists since time immemorial, exposed them to deepening poverty as a result of loss of access to their richest traditional rangelands. According to GIZ<sup>4</sup>, more than 56% of the population lives in absolute poverty, a situation exacerbated by the depletion of the remaining natural resources and the effects of climate change.

The granting of a huge concession and subsequent investment by Saudi Star in the Gambella lowlands of Ethiopia had a cataclysmic effect on the local people. Gambella is a wetland the size of Belgium in Ethiopia’s southwest, whose rivers (collectively known as the Baro-Akobo River Basin) feed the Nile. Much of the flow of this system has been diverted to irrigate rice for export to Saudi Arabia. Genocide Watch reported a “campaign of genocidal violence” that forced between 6,000 and 8,000 Anuak people to flee Gambella for the relative safety of Sudan. Long-term land concessions granted by the government made these “developments” possible.

Investments in agricultural businesses in the developing world are attracting ever-more capital. However, the Africans that benefit from these enterprises tend to be investors, politicians or employees, not small-scale farmers.

The LNDP plans to mobilise USD 2 billion per annum to invest in the rehabilitation of at least 12 million hectares of degraded lands, primarily in the developing world.

The Fund intends to make land degradation neutrality profitable by supporting land rehabilitation and generating revenue streams from sustainable production on ‘upgraded’ lands. According to the White Paper, the investment model will typically follow four phases:

- Acquisition of concession licenses on degraded lands.
- Rehabilitation outsourced to partner operators or production companies against a leasing fee.
- Sustainable production/use contracted to national and international producers against a concession or leasing fee. Additional income streams from restoration credits (e.g. biodiversity, carbon, water, etc.) generated by the rehabilitation.
- Exit by returning upgraded land to landowners or by selling land concessions to new investors.

Within this model, the role of land-using communities will probably be as providers of labour; however, if they are not compliant or are surplus to the needs of the operators or production companies they might well find themselves unwelcome on their own lands.

The Secretariat of the UNCCD has engaged the services of Pascal Canfin, former French Minister of Development, to develop technical aspects of the LNDP. Next month the Twelfth Conference of the Parties of the UNCCD will be convened in Ankara, Turkey, and decisions will be made that will shape the future of investment in land restoration on a global level.

Underpinning the logic of the LNDP is the persistent belief in the existence of ‘un-utilised’ or ‘under-utilised’ land in the developing world. Legal land tenure systems often uncritically accept this concept, leading to structural marginalisation of rural communities from their lands. Further, the belief that

foreign direct investment is inherently virtuous and necessary for economic development leads governments to suppress any potential impediments to foreign direct investment, and to offer generous terms to investors to the detriment of their own citizens. Investors in Africa have a long tradition of offering incentives to decision makers, and this tradition of bribery continues to flourish.

As with many new developments, there is considerable enthusiasm for the LNDP as the 'next big thing' in the struggle to achieve greater sustainability. However, it could prove to be a Trojan Horse that leads to the alienation of the rights, livelihoods, culture and lifestyles of millions of people in the world's drylands. There is ample evidence that new instruments are readily exploited by vested interests for their own benefit. Drynet<sup>5</sup> advises extreme caution in formulating the LNDP, and proposes that more sustainable benefit will be derived by the people of the global drylands and by the ecosystems that they depend on if the vehicles currently available for funding sustainable land management, restoration and rehabilitation are provided with the resources that would otherwise be invested in a new Fund.

#### Notes

1. UNCCD, "Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD): Some Global Facts & Figures" Available at: [www.unccd.int](http://www.unccd.int)
2. Land degradation neutrality: Resilience at local, national and regional levels. Available at: [www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Publications/Land\\_Degrad\\_Neutrality\\_E\\_Web.pdf](http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Publications/Land_Degrad_Neutrality_E_Web.pdf)
3. Available at: [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/)
4. <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/23119.html>
5. Drynet is a network of 14 civil society organisations from across the world, centred on local communities and organisations, that is working to counter land degradation.

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## Addressing womens' vulnerability to climate change

By Felix Kwabena Donkor

GenderCC and Earthlife Africa Johannesburg are working jointly with communities in three provinces with the aim of improving women's resilience to climate change through developing farming skills that enable them to provide food for their families and establish cooperatives to generate cash income.

Climate change presents different challenges across social strata. The increased frequency and intensity of droughts and the associated food insecurity impacts small-scale farmers immensely, most of whom are women. Women are also often vulnerable to climate change due to their high dependence on natural resources and fewer physical resources or assets to sell for cash income. The project recognises the role of women as household leaders and addresses some of these vulnerabilities by improving access to water and energy for about 350 women, and enhancing their skills in sustainable farming.

The practical objectives are:

- reduce the amount of time that the women spend searching for water and doing household work so that they can invest more time in income generating activities;
- provide access to clean energy options and train women to manage such resources;
- build capacity in sustainable farming so that women can maximise output from their food gardens.

Crop yield is improved through compost provided by newly installed biogas digesters, access to energy is improved through biogas digesters and photovoltaic panels, and access to water is improved through water harvesters.



**Project participants at Founders Educare Center in Cape Town installing a biogas digester and learning how it works**



**Project participants at Risenga Primary School, Siyandhani Village, at their first harvest**

The project was developed in partnership with communities and stakeholders, and included knowledge sharing workshops on the causes and impacts of climate change and adaptation solutions. Women in the various communities formed structures that are responsible for implementing the work and ensuring its sustainability. Project sites were selected based on the presence of large numbers of women farmers and their interest in being part of the programme. In Gauteng there are four project sites, in Magaliesburg, Soweto, Vaal Ekurhuleni and Springs. There are two project sites in the Western Cape, in Khayelitsha and Green Park, and two in Limpopo, in Tzaneen and Giyani.

The project activities were premised on a *learn and build* methodology, to enable project participants to install, maintain and manage new equipment, and use new farming techniques. The techniques are locally appropriate, locally owned and easy to manage. Some hard lessons were learnt during project implementation, such as ensuring that communities are supportive of the project, and the need for respect for community structures and gender and cultural norms. Project members also implemented an approach to sharing proceeds to maintain harmony and goodwill amongst stakeholders: a third of produce from the food gardens is sold to generate income, a third is given to school feeding schemes, and a third is for household consumption.

The project demonstrates how appropriate leadership and incentives can mobilise communities to address vulnerability. However on-going support is required for training and marketing of produce.

## Climate News

### Alternate strategies to mining: Seminar 28-29 September 2015

During the last two weeks of September, the People's Dialogue, together with other organisations affected by mining, is hosting an exchange with Latin American activists from social movements and trade unions that have been affected by extractivism. The exchange is intended to inform participants about the impacts of mining on mineworkers, mining communities, women and landless South Africans. At the end of the exchange the collective experience will be pooled at a seminar, scheduled for 28-29 September 2015, that will analyse mining and explore strategies for just solutions.

During the course of the seminar current struggles against extractivism will be profiled, mining will be situated in the context of the global crisis, alternatives to extractivism and a just transition to a low carbon economy will be explored, and the practices of transnational corporations in southern Africa and Latin America will be examined.

**If you would like to attend, please contact Khunji at Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE): [khunji@tcoe.org.za](mailto:khunji@tcoe.org.za) or 021 685 3033**



### **Congratulations Dr Des D'Sa**

Early this month, a hero of the environmental justice movement in South Africa, Des D'Sa, was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Durban University of Technology Department of Health Sciences, in recognition of his outstanding work to address injustices against communities in Durban and elsewhere in the country.

D'Sa is Coordinator of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), KZN Coordinator of the Right2KNOW Campaign, and Coordinator for the Durban Social Forum. He is also a board member of a number of activist and church organisations. His work is recognised internationally by partners and other communities affected by environmental injustices, and he received the Diakonia Human Rights Award in 2013, and the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2014.

D'sa has first hand experience of injustice, starting with the forced removal of his family in the 1960's from a smallholding in Cato Manor to flats in Wentworth. He became involved in social issues about 20 years ago, supporting creation of public forum meetings in South Durban and trying to resolve local problems. His career started in the textile industry and he later moved to Sasol in Isipingo. As a trade unionist he became familiar with the dangers that the chemical industry poses to workers and residents around factories, and spoke out at work in favour of better environmental controls and alternative production processes. He continues to speak out in local, national and international spaces to improve the well being of people in his community as well as the global community.

**More information on Dsa's work is available at: [www.sdcea.co.za](http://www.sdcea.co.za)**

### **Durban Declaration on REDD**

In early September, in the prelude to the World Forestry Congress 2015, representatives of communities, peasant movements, Indigenous Peoples and civil society organisations met to discuss community resilience initiatives and promote solutions to forest and biodiversity conservation. A key outcome was the *Durban Declaration on REDD* which calls on the international community to stop investments in REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) and instead address the underlying causes of forest loss. The group pointed out that REDD, as a market-based mechanism, commodifies and privatises nature and puts profit above the well being of humanity and the planet. REDD is associated with increased biodiversity loss through deforestation and promotion of monoculture tree plantations, land grabs, human rights violations, and a vilification of forest-dependent communities and their bio-cultural approaches to conservation and restoration.

**For more information on the *Durban Declaration on REDD*, please write to Anabela Lemos of Justice Ambiental: [anabela.ja.mz@gmail.com](mailto:anabela.ja.mz@gmail.com)**

### **Life on the sea floor could be working against climate change**

A study by the British Antarctic Survey shows that climate change impacts on sea ice over the Atlantic has caused a doubling of sea floor life forms, called bryozoans, and this in turn is increasing carbon storage in the system. The results were obtained using high-resolution images and other data that was collected across West Antarctic seas over more than 20 years. Other studies have shown that these West Antarctic bryozoans might play a significant role in storing carbon. In addition, other sea floor organisms also play a significant role in carbon storage. Continuous research to understand oceans is important.

### **Extreme sea level occurrences in the Pacific are projected to double**

Tropical Pacific islands may see more frequent swings in extreme sea levels, in addition to the gradual sea level rise that is an established impact of climate change. El Niño events are associated with a see-saw in sea levels, with higher sea levels shifting eastward and lower sea levels experienced in the western Pacific. This is followed six months to a year later by a north-south see-saw with levels dropping about 30 cm in the southern hemisphere. In the South Pacific Islands, these events expose shallow marine systems, causing coral die-offs and foul smelling tides. Researchers at the University of Hawai'i and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation used modelling and tide-gauge analysis to show that projected changes in the behaviour of El Niño patterns and the response of the Pacific wind will result in a doubling of extreme sea level occurrences. This will have adaptation implications for Pacific island communities.



### **South African industry found to frequently fail to comply with environmental laws**

This month the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) released a report that reveals that South African industry frequently fails to comply with environmental laws, or to disclose those non-compliances to their shareholders. CER had conducted a baseline assessment of 20 listed South African companies, including PPC, Sappi, Lonmin, Arcelor Mittal, Exxaro, African Rainbow Minerals and Sasol. The report states that the manner in which South African companies are rated for socially responsible investment is “wholly inadequate”, and that investors are failing to recognise or adequately investigate transgressions or potential transgressions.

**Full Disclosure: the truth about corporate environmental compliance in South Africa, is available at: <http://cer.org.za/full-disclosure>**

## **Newsletter Credits**

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Thanks to the EurekaAlert service.

Articles do not necessarily represent the views of all Adaptation Network members.

To comment or contribute please email: [info@adaptationnetwork.org.za](mailto:info@adaptationnetwork.org.za)

**Our deadline for the next newsletter is 22 October 2015.**