

New lenses on a very old and perception-laden human issue: land degradation

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends

Good morning and welcome to the last plenary session of the CDLS 2016 dedicated to feedbacks from Dialogue Groups. I'm pleased to have been entrusted this delightful task which is to provide few introductory insights and remarks. I will elaborate on five points

1. The CDLS has provided new lenses on a very old and perception-laden issue: land degradation

The CDLS or Caux Dialogue on Land and Security grew out of a one-day program dedicated to land related issues in the Caux Dialogue on Human Security in 2012 and the recognition that conflict hotspots and degradation hotspots match frighteningly closely.

Since then the CDLS has been playing a catalytic role in harnessing the knowledge for changing the conversation, providing new lenses in order to assess and address the root causes and engage leaders and stakeholders for action to avoid processes of degradation and invest in the valuation of our degraded land.

The reality is that no land user will purposely make decision to degrade his livelihood-based resource. In fact, land degradation is also a perception-laden issue because what for instance is a degradation process for a biologist might not be assessed as such by a farmer or a down-stream water manager. Degradation is all about consecutive negative tradeoffs in land use decisions. Therefore, understanding and addressing those often hidden tradeoffs are key for avoiding degradation and furthering restoration or rehabilitation.

Some of the new lenses the CDLS has helped provide are about the followings:

- a) Degraded lands are valuable assets for profitable investments that can also enhance sustainability locally regionally and globally;
- b) The prerequisite for land restoration and landscape transformation to take place is leadership for change that starts at personal level (be the change you want to see happening) in order to lead by example;
- c) Trust building is crucial for situational analysis and decision-making about successful investment avenues, as well as;
- d) Land degradation and land use related conflict hot spots should therefore be considered as opportunity spots for action **in order to ground peace and human security.**

A major book title "Land restoration: reclaiming land for a sustainable future" that demonstrates the breadth of interest and expertise engaged, has been launched here last Friday.

2. We all agree that sustainable land management including restoration pays. But if it pays, why is it not wide spread? Are farmers stupid?

In fact, the right question is: if sustainable land management (a generic name to land stewardship schemes) pays, it pays for who?

For instance, why is it that in similar biophysical context and human environment conditions, some communities decide to invest their meagre resources in improving the health of their land while others will collect their savings to fund the very risky and often deadly trip of one of their son to Europe through the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea? We need to decipher how these decisions are made and why some people, some communities some governments still fail to discern the potential of their degraded land, of their opportunity hotspots; and why some development partners are so slow to change their lenses.

The issue is that the land users, the farmers who are expected to invest in sustainable land management are not able to capture its multiple off-site, often downstream socio-economic return on investment and benefits.

Here comes the essential lens that should guide our efforts in helping land users especially smallholder farmers to become landscape managers:

- Accountability and benefits sharing along value chain through just governance.

3. The key messages from this year's dialogue are about:

The centrality of climate change to all our futures, and the imperative to address it; the power of land restoration to address the vulnerability to climate change as well as to mitigate green house gases emissions; experiences of land restoration, and potential opportunity to reduce conflict; the political salience of migration, and the role of land degradation as one of its key drivers or catalyzers.

During the last four days of CDLS we have once again experienced the dual nature of Caux Dialogues: both technical exchanges on key practical issues, and personal exchanges that develop networks and initiatives to deliver practical solutions. In that regard I would like to acknowledge the CDLS Fellowship and its impressive examples of enterprises addressing vital challenges and generating sustainable solutions.

The bottleneck they often face is about stubbornly ineffective and non-conducive governance systems.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

As you all know, the main theme of CDLS 2016 is "Realizing the potential of land restoration to mitigate migration". The understanding that migration is an issue of sustainability is needed at all levels: local, national, regional as well as global.

Recent development in the European Union (Brexit) shows that sustainability requires a new type of democracy, a "knowledge democracy".

We cannot solve our problem with the same thinking (government and governance system) we used to create them. (Einstein)

Europe is in transition; the world is at a major tipping point; will that transition be towards sustainability? Time will tell! But for sure what got us here won't get us there (to paraphrase Marshall Goldsmith). At such a crossroad you don't only change gear you make life changing choices.

4. Making democracy effective for delivering sustainable development

In January 2014, I was privileged to travel to Panchgani, Asia Plateau in India to attend a conference and contribute to a session titled: "Making democracy real". Here is an excerpt of my contribution.

- **Democracy is being challenged?**

Change occurring at different levels and scales are challenging the existing democratic systems. Democracy is a concept often defined by its means and institutions, not by its aim purpose and expected outcomes: a political system with institutional arrangements for the power to rule which are to be legally entrusted to the elite through electoral competition for the popular vote.

According to UN GA Resolution 66/163 Democracy is a "universal value" based on "the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and full participation in all aspects of their life".

Therefore, Democracy has often been confounded with its means of devolution of power (free election) and its institutions and governance (Government, parliament, the judiciary, with check and balance mechanisms).

Unfortunately, we are seeing and experiencing in many countries in the world, being developed, developing or emerging, that existing democratic systems have lost their *raison d'être*.

Democracy seems to have work for the profit of few. In many places the elite has even found a way to hijack power through seemingly free elections.

Even **representative democracy**, as the dominant concept, is now met with wide spread skepticism, in its ability to effectively address the increasingly complex and intertwined issues of development at all levels, and thus seems to decline, to be in decay.

I share the view that the definition of the concept of democracy should also encompass its aim, purpose and expected outcomes which I believe are about ensuring: the economic, social and environmental well-being of the people, creating and sustaining a governance system and environment for inclusive and responsive political processes and settlements towards sustainability for all.

We have to address the democratic deficits

The dominant concept of democracy is very top-down system which has led to democratic deficits in many countries (especially developing and emerging ones).

Among the democratic deficits are: lack of participation in decision-making processes, lack of transparency and accountability, lack of access to information and free media, etc,

Democratic deficits are increasingly recognized globally as lying "at the core of critical development challenges" leading to inequality in sharing the benefits of growth, poverty and human insecurity, environmental degradation, social and political violence, state fragility, etc.

Moreover, democratic governance has not generated the desirable corporate governance and market regulation to ensure profits are sustainable.

Making democracy real for sustainable development is making it work for its 3 pillars: people, planet, and prosperity/profit (or social, environment and economy) or making democracy deliver prosperity for the people and the planet.

To ensure sustainability we would be well advised to consider why democracy has been driving unsustainability in order to reform our government and governance systems.

5. From the CDLS to KDLS or: from Caux to transforming our national and local governance systems

I am pleased that this year's Caux Dialogue reflects events between conferences, including the first Dialogue at national level, with reports from Kenya. The KDLS is indeed a promising avenue that we might consider carrying forward into the coming years in order to use the CDLS template to influence national and local transformations including at governance level. Dialogue groups have identified interest in further events at national and regional level.

This is the time for reflection on the way ahead

This year, the various Dialogue Groups within the CDLS have focused on next steps. And this plenary session offers the opportunity for feedback from those groups to inform thinking for the years ahead.

For instance, workshops have identified an important research agenda, to build evidence about what effect land restoration has on conflict, migration and poverty – about what works and why. How do we carry it from here?

Trust that we can together refine thinking on a programme that gives us all a chance to play our part in tackling some of the world's most pressing challenges.

Thank you

Luc GNACADJA
President of GPS-Dev
Past UN-SG & UNCCD's Executive Secretary
Former Minister of Environment of Benin