



Date: 22 May 2024
Ref: STI/JMK/SM/lo-017
cc: eo, jmk, at, bjo, boc, cc

Dear Mr. Laliberté,

Subject: Enhanced cooperation between the UNCCD and CEOS

In the past few years, the United Nations of the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and CEOS have strengthened their cooperation within the framework of the Group on Earth Observation Land Degradation Neutrality (GEO-LDN) flagship.

We appreciate CEOS efforts in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in particular towards improving land surface observations for SDG Indicator 15.3.1. The engagement of CEOS in the GEO-LDN flagship, which has a clear policy mandate from the UNCCD to assist countries in their reporting requirements for SDG indicator 15.3.1, has raised the profile of Earth observation and put EO data into the hands of those who need it most.

Building on previous UNCCD engagement with the CEOS SDG Coordination Group and Systems Engineering Office (SEO), we trust further cooperation will provide a range of mutually beneficial opportunities - from facilitating streamlined access to EO data and tools for LDN planning, implementation, and monitoring, to raising the awareness of decision makers about the vital role that EO plays in providing actionable information to tackle the multiple planetary crises.

For a start, CEOS can support the work of UNCCD and its partners in preparing for the next SDG 15.3.1 reporting process due to start in mid-2025 by working closely with GEO-LDN on the emerging data and analytics needs for the indicator.

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Countries in regional geographies of small island developing states (SIDS), mountainous states and hyper arid areas have expressed their need to go beyond moderate resolution satellite observations to track land degradation at higher spatial resolution. CEOS could directly contribute to assessing the availability and suitability of land surface datasets for these geographies, by prioritising SIDS and hyper arid areas.

Based on and in line with the Good Practice Guidance for SDG Indicator 15.3.1, CEOS could also provide assessment and improved guidance on: i) linking estimates of land condition between coarse and fine scale datasets, necessary for moving from reporting at the global scale to planning interventions and monitoring outcomes at the local scale; ii) cross-calibration of historical and new satellite observations, necessary to transition to new EO sensors; and iii) new and emerging datasets that can serve as default datasets, provided by the UNCCD to countries for reporting.

In terms of standardization, CEOS and its Land Surface Imaging Virtual Constellation could play a critical role in the development of Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) standards for geospatial LDN reporting indicators, building on the Analysis Ready Data (ARD) concepts and prior work by GEO-LDN on minimum data quality standards for SDG indicator 15.3.1. A Standards Working Group Charter for the establishment of the geospatial reporting indicators working group is currently in the phase of electronic voting by OGC members.

CEOS could consider playing a role in efforts to synergize national target setting between the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UNCCD LDN target-setting programme to achieve co-benefits for biodiversity and land. There is currently strong demand for a product or an analysis to demonstrate the benefits of aligning targets, such as a spatial comparison of hot spots of land degradation, ecosystem degradation, and biodiversity loss to support joint mapping of strategic intervention areas.

Finally, building on the fruitful participation of the CEOS Executive Officer in the recent GEO-LDN Principals Meeting on 11-12 March 2024, we would encourage CEOS to continue providing: i) strategic guidance to GEO-LDN, with the possibility to eventually join its Advisory Board once established; and ii) in-kind contributions to GEO-LDN capacity development activities, for instance by participating as trainers. We also welcome collaboration on joint communications and outreach on many of these activities to drive awareness and uptake.

These are just some suggestions for areas of potential enhanced cooperation between the UNCCD and CEOS as we prepare for the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) which will take place in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from the 2nd to 13th December 2024. We take this occasion to invite CEOS to take part in this event, which is expected to be the largest-ever meeting of the UNCCD's 197 Parties, and to contribute to the delivery of an ambitious Action Agenda that will include a thematic day on Science, Technology and Innovation for land and drought resilience.

We look forward to hearing your views and ideas on how we can advance our strategic partnership soon and in the longer term, as we shape a vision for a land target in the post-2030 UNCCD strategic framework and Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief

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