

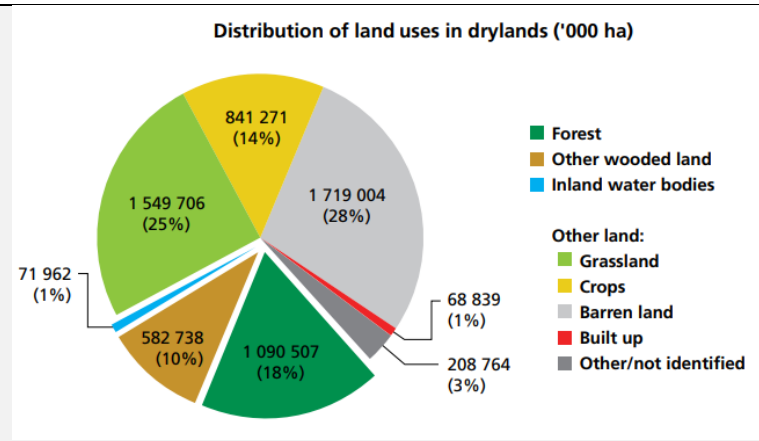
Strategic Country Cluster Evaluation: GEF support to Dryland Countries

AUDIT TRAIL

Stakeholder written comments on the draft approach paper circulated on June 15, 2022

September 2022

Author	Topic/ Paragraph	Comment	Response and actions taken
FAO	4-8	<p>The information given for the description of Drylands (paragraphs 4-8) could be updated with more recent datasets and publications such as FAO’s report entitled <i>Trees, forests and land use in drylands: the first global assessment</i> (2019) ca7148en.pdf (fao.org) https://www.fao.org/dryland-assessment/en/</p> <p>Drylands are predominantly used as rangelands, including grasses (31 percent), other woody vegetation covers up to (8 percent), shrubs, scattered trees and barren lands. However, forests are key natural resources in drylands, accounting for 27percent of the world’s forest area that are concentrated in sub-humid and semi-arid lands. Crops account for 14 percent of drylands. Many trees in drylands grow outside forests (30 percent of cropland and 60 percent of built-up land show some tree cover. Trees are found on 2 billion hectares of drylands (32 percent of the total dryland area).</p> <p>Here is an example from First Global Assessment report.</p> <p align="center">Figure: Distribution of Land uses in drylands (‘000 ha) (FAO. 2019)</p>	<p>No action taken. Thanks for these up-to-date references. In the interest of time and considering that these updates don’t call for changes in the evaluation design, scope and key questions, we are not using these references to update the approach paper. We will use these references when drafting the context sections of the evaluation report.</p>



FAO's first global assessment, *Trees, forests and land use in drylands* (2019) report, highlighted that the different zones of drylands combined cover an area of around 6.1 billion hectares, or 41 percent of the world's land if presumed drylands are not included. According to a new FAO report entitled "Presumed Dryland Assessment - Valuing, Restoring and Managing Presumed Drylands", which was launched at the UNCCD COP15 covering about 41 percent of the Earth's land surface, the percentage of dryland areas is much larger (48 percent) if "presumed drylands," are included.

The United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP–WCMC) defines "presumed drylands" as those areas that do not meet the criteria of low annual precipitation levels, but are characterised by dryland features, including an aridity index greater than or equal to 0.65. Areas covered are Cerrado in South America, the Miombo–Mopane woodlands in Southern Africa and the Qinghai–Tibetan Plateau, <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc0110en/>

Table 1, with distribution of values on drylands from Safriel *et al.*, 2005 seems a bit old. Drylands are moving, their aridity index changes with climate change. For example, the DSL-IP Cuchi project site in Angola has moved from a predominantly dry-sub humid area to a semi-arid area in a few years. This was due to increased temperatures and less/erratic rainfall. In Drylands, Landuse / landcover and

population changed from that time as well. In the GLARE DSS, there are some updated data using the JRC proposed method (<https://projectgeffao.users.earthengine.app/view/glare>):

Terraclim 2001-2020		ESA 2018	
Dryland sub-habitat	% global land area	Cultivated Ha	Cultivated %
Dry Sub-humid	6.1	333,003,696	14.9%
Semi-arid	14.4	578,761,224	25.9%
Arid	12.8	108,091,640	4.8%
Hyper-arid	8.9	12,819,534	0.6%
Total	42.2	1,032,676,093	46.2%
World total		2,234,721,332	

The other values can be also updated from WorldPop if needed. We could also see if GLARE could be updated to provide statistics by selecting dryland categories.

FAO

Paragraph 38, Annex 1

The criteria for the selection of projects should be revised, or the list of the selected projects should be curated (paragraph 38, Annex 1). Only projects whose target areas are in drylands should be included. Dryland countries often have non-dryland areas, therefore the location of the project is important when considering if in drylands or not. According to current criteria, projects in GEF recipient countries with at least 50 percent or more of their total land area characterized as drylands (defined as lands with an aridity index of less than 0.65), are included.

This could include projects targeting humid areas, which could be the case, for example, of the project “Improving the Conservation of Biodiversity in Atlantic Forest of Eastern Paraguay” (ID 2690). This project is included in the list of Annex 1, but as the title indicates, it targets the Atlantic forest in Eastern Paraguay, which is a humid area. Please see map below.

Partially addressed. Addressing this comment would require georeferencing all GEF projects from GEF-4 onwards to the subnational level, which isn’t possible. To partially address this comment, a second screening of the portfolio was done to eliminate projects primarily focused in humid areas or wetlands. This resulted in the identification of 9 projects, which were excluded from the initial 229. A new paragraph 40 was added to explain this additional screening on humid areas and wetlands. Later on, during the portfolio and document reviews in the evaluation phase, if it

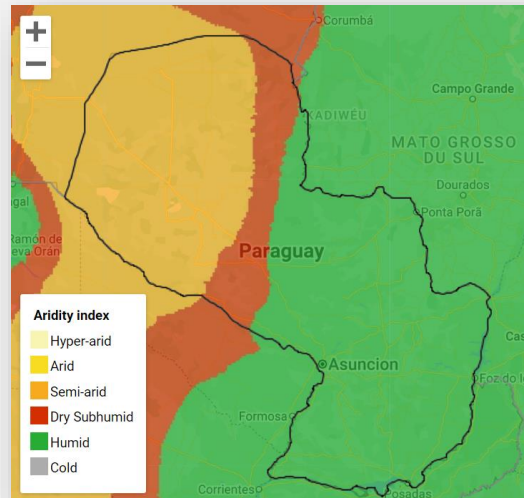


Figure 1: Map of aridity Index in Paraguay

Source: <https://projectgeffao.users.earthengine.app/view/glare>

This approach leaves out relevant projects for drylands, such as the project “Sustainable management and restoration of the **Dry Forest** of the Northern Coast of Peru” (ID 10541), which targets a unique dry ecosystem, highly biodiverse and relevant. Peru has more than 50% of its territory with an aridity index higher than 0.65.

Projects such as “Innovative transformation of China’s food production systems and agro-ecological landscapes” (ID 10246) that do not have a primary focus on provinces in Dryland area are included in the cohort of study.

We would recommend to include in this evaluation, the following projects:

- “Sustainable Land Management and Climate-Friendly Agriculture” (ID 4583),

clearly emerges that a project primarily focuses on humid areas it will be excluded at that point.

GEF ID 10541 was not included as according to the Aridity Index sources we used, Peru has 30.5% of its territory with an AI > 0.65.

GEF ID 10246 has been excluded.

GEF ID 4583 has been included.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Strengthening Resilience to Climate Change through Integrated Agricultural and Pastoral Management in the Sahelian zone in the Framework of the Sustainable Land Management Approach” (4822) and - “SFM Rehabilitation of Forest Landscapes and Degraded Land with Particular Attention to Saline Soils and Areas Prone to Wind Erosion” (ID 3450). The recently concluded Terminal Evaluation of the project (ID 3450) highlights remarkable results obtained despite the extended project duration. 	<p>GEF ID 4822 has been included.</p> <p>The TE of GEF ID 3450 is not yet available in the GEF Portal. We will include it when available.</p>
FAO	General Comment	<p>UNCCD is mentioned 8 times in the paper while the other two Rio conventions are not. More room could be dedicated to integration of the report with the goals of the remaining two Rio conventions, since GEF is actually the funding mechanism to implement all these conventions. We suggest to give more visibility and relevance to the evaluation of the alignment of the projects with the CBD and UNFCCC targets. This applies in particular for KQ1 (<i>To what extent has GEF support been responsive to conventions guidance and relevant to the specific environmental challenges in dryland countries, and are there any gaps?</i>), since paragraph 31 only mentions alignment with UNCCD. It would be interesting to consider if the GEF project targets are aligned and refer to national Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) using National plans, target setting reports, strategies and commitments as sources of information (also linked to KQ2). If possible, the evaluation could consider as an indicator, the engagement of the national UNCCD, CBD and UNFCC Focal Points during project design and implementation. This will would also be relevant for KQ1 and KQ2.</p>	<p>Addressed. We definitely agree that as the GEF is the funding mechanism for these conventions, any relevance assessment should cover alignment with all three of them. Reference to CBD and UNFCCC was added to paragraph 18. LDN-related findings from the LD focal area study were also added to that paragraph. A new paragraph 30 stresses that the impacts of climate-related events such as droughts and floods in drylands are likely to exceed tipping points where total crop failure and significant biodiversity loss are possible. The two suggested indicators have been added to KQ1 in the evaluation matrix.</p>
FAO	Paragraphs 12, 21, 31 and 42	<p>In the approach paper, after all that is said about drylands occupying 42.2% of the land and its importance in many matters exceeding that number, the sentence in paragraph 12: “equivalent to 11 percent of the total GEF-4 to GEF-7 financing” may require a bit of explanation. It is understandable that there are other pressing issues, which GEF attends to, but the way it is presented sounds like the biggest issues only gets 10% of the resources.</p>	<p>No action taken. Paragraph 12 s descriptive, it doesn’t suggest that drylands are the biggest issue GEF should address.</p>

Paragraph 21 recognizing the importance of dryland forest ecosystems is welcome since they are key and fragile ecosystems. While mapping dryland forest areas has an important degree of uncertainty, if we consider the ESA land cover 2018 when thinking of allocating resources:

Land Cover ESA 2018 - UNCCD reporting Categories in Drylands	Hectares	Percent
Tree-covered	487,785,513.61	8.2%
Grassland	2,508,656,450.76	42.1%
Cropland	1,032,676,093.45	17.3%
Wetland	35,195,021.75	0.6%
Artificial	15,456,722.28	0.3%
Other Land (bare)	1,788,568,785.21	30.0%
Water Body	89,913,762.56	1.5%

This is tied with KQ1 and paragraph 31 on neglected areas. It is also good to consider that Grasslands are the dominating landscape and ecosystem in drylands. Grasslands ecosystems have also lots of properties in production of food, carbon sequestration, biodiversity and water cycle regulation. Focusing resources on Grassland oriented projects could also be globally beneficial. In this line, Croplands are also key to food security and subject to very intensive use and thus potential erosion.

The mapping of GEF interventions areas (a geographical identification of the site location or polygon where field activity is carried out) is a key feature that may provide many benefits by allowing us to perform different types of analysis. First, by determining how many areas with similar conditions to the intervention area are in a given country, we can in principle identify neglected areas or the scalability/scaling-up potential of the activities after the project's life cycle (also related to KQ4) to areas of the same type. Second, benefits could be tied to both KQ3 and KQ4, to potentially monitor impact indicators using remote sensing at

The comments and additional data provided on paragraphs 21 and 42 are interesting, thanks for those. We will keep them in mind during the course of the evaluation.

Noted.

Noted.

		<p>subnational or national scale and link this work to convention reporting (like the case of LDN, for which FAO has many different DSS: SEPAL, ILAM, GEE).</p> <p>The word “potentially” is used in the second case above because the remote sensing approaches using some of the geospatial datasets proposed in Annex 2 and paragraph 42 (i) and (ii) may not be suitable for impact monitoring of field implementation, especially in small plots (less than 10ha). Nevertheless, if a different approach cannot be used at this stage, please make sure to state the possible sources of uncertainties together with the results of the exercise. In the case of (i) Hansen data, forest loss is monitored but current forest gains or recovery are not. Also, this product as other similar ones have the most uncertainty levels on Drylands and fail to detect many forests (see the Forest Consensus Map).</p> <p>https://projectgeffao.users.earthengine.app/view/glare and published in https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7986en). NDVI time series, can be analyzed in many ways and be more sensitive to certain changes (https://doi.org/10.3390/rs11242918). It has also been shown that it may take more than 10 years to respond to SLM intervention (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2018.12.019).</p>	<p>It is not the GEF IEO task to monitor field implementation. The approach we propose aims at independently assessing change through geospatial analysis. We will consider these suggestions and sources when designing that analysis and specify any sources of uncertainty in the datasets chosen.</p>
FAO	General Comment	<p>Regarding KQ3, for the evaluation of how GEF interventions in dryland countries produced their targeted environmental outcomes and associated socioeconomic co-benefits, it is necessary to better identify the indicators that will be used.</p> <p>Case study deep dives should consider field scale measurements and monitoring to evaluate impact on environmental outcomes, such as the analysis of changes in biophysical indicators (i.e. soil properties, vegetation cover, species diversity, productivity, etc.). It would also be important to link the analysis of these indicators to the GEF core indicators for GEF7 projects and the Tracking Tool indicators for GEF-5 and older projects.</p> <p>Regarding socio economic indicators, we suggest to analyze whether projects integrated the land tenure dimension. It will be important to collect this kind of data in line with UNCCD COP 14/Decision 26 and COP 15 Decision 27. This will</p>	<p>Partially addressed. See the specific answers here below.</p> <p>It is not the GEF IEO task to monitor field implementation. Existing in-country field scale indicators and measurements will be independently verified before use in the analysis.</p> <p>Thanks for this useful suggestion. We will include it in a separate case study methodology note.</p>

		<p>also be useful to inform GEF-8 project design targeting Land Degradation resources. Finally, it would be interesting to analyze if the integration of the Land Tenure dimension contributed to sustainability (under KQ4)</p> <p>Also worth of effort would be the issue of impact monitoring, which is directly linked to the set of chosen indicators. These should reflect the impact over time in an unambiguous way (i.e. without inter-correlations if possible).</p> <p>Evaluation of the progress in national capacities for robust monitoring should be included in the analysis of KW4 and KW5 to evaluate sustainability and project impact.</p>	<p>Unclear what this comment suggests to do specifically.</p> <p>This suggestion will be included in the case study methodology note.</p>
FAO	General Comment	<p>Regarding the geospatial analysis that is proposed for KQ4 (paragraph 42), the two indicators that are mentioned to analyze the change of local environmental conditions (forest loss and NDVI) should be complemented with additional information.</p> <p>For land cover changes we suggest to also analyze other transitions in addition to forest loss, such as grasslands or cropland loss/gain. Regarding the analysis of NDVI time series, we suggest better identification of the indicator that will be used, such as Land Productivity Dynamics (SDG 15.3.1 sub-indicator)¹, and careful definition of the methodology that will be used, given that it has been proven that different algorithms for LPD using the same NDVI time series data produce contrasting results². FAO-WOCAT LPD³ could be a possibility.</p> <p>We also suggest to use The FERM platform to assess the status of any project's sites in terms of historical changes in x landscape/s. This platform supports the development of resource-efficient and fit-for-purpose monitoring that generates quality data and information and supports domestic restoration needs and other</p>	<p>Addressed. The suggested geospatial data sources are appreciated. The limited geospatial utility for small areas and measuring certain indicators are useful observations. Language has been added to that paragraph to refer to such limits and uncertainty.</p>

¹ Sims, N.C., Newnham, G.J., England, J.R., Guerschman, J., Cox, S.J.D., Roxburgh, S.H., Viscarra Rossel, R.A., Fritz, S. and Wheeler, I. 2021. Good Practice Guidance. SDG Indicator 15.3.1, Proportion of Land That Is Degraded Over Total Land Area. Version 2.0. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Bonn, Germany.

² Teich, I.; Gonzalez Roglich, M.; Corso, M.L.; García, C.L. Combining Earth Observations, Cloud Computing, and Expert Knowledge to Inform National Level Degradation Assessments in Support of the 2030 Development Agenda. *Remote Sens.* **2019**, *11*, 2918. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rs11242918>

³ FAO. 2022. Overview of land degradation neutrality (LDN) in Europe and Central Asia. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7986en>

		<p>reporting processes with strong ownership by governments, relevant national entities, sub-national entities, NGOs, the private sector and civil society organizations. FERM Registry (fao.org)</p> <p>For accurate impact assessment of the investments in both bio-physical and Socio-economic dimension, the exact location (georeferenced polygon) of the field intervention needs to be known and field survey is needed prior and post implementation. This data can later be used to validate and adjust Remote Sensing models to fill gaps and extend the analysis to larger areas, or estimate scaling out possibilities. Without field data, remote sensing analysis should include at least an estimation or explanation of the degree of uncertainty in the results. Regarding biophysical indicators, the current proposal may yield less impact than what is actually happening in the field.</p> <p>Please consider for future portfolio impact assessments that many of the impact indicators that are bio-physical and related to biodiversity, soil health and degradation processes will only be captured in the field. Delineation of plots (polygons) where the project ground actions are implemented and measurement of baseline values (field sampling) are needed to make a realistic impact measurement. This should become a requirement and common practice if metrics like Increased Soil Organic Carbon or Tons of Soil Erosion Avoided per USD Invested are of interest.</p>	
FAO	General Comment	<p>Drylands are important for food security and mitigating climate change, they are also characterized by variable precipitation, climate variability and water scarcity. The impacts of climate change are exacerbating these conditions with longer periods of drought, accelerated desertification, and resulting impacts on biodiversity and vegetation cover that reduces soil fertility – all of which present negative impacts on food security and nutrition. Population growth coupled with expansion of drylands due to climate change could increase the number of people living in challenging conditions by up to 70 percent by 2030⁴. Therefore, climate change can act as a conflict threat multiplier whereby already fragile ecosystems and local communities are pushed beyond coping capacity,</p>	<p>Addressed. This comment is well taken. The way GEF interventions applied conflict sensitivity approaches has been assessed as part of a major evaluation of GEF interventions in fragile and conflict affected countries (GEF IEO, 2020). Evidence on the Drylands SCCE projects portfolio will be extracted from that evaluation to assess the</p>

⁴ World Bank.2017. Confronting Drought in Africa’s Drylands: Opportunities for Enhancing Resilience. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/africa-s-drylands-opportunities-cut-vulnerability-drought-and-famine-are-within-reach>

		<p>resulting in increasing tensions related to natural resource access and use⁵. Key vulnerable groups in dryland ecosystems include pastoralists and agro-pastoralist households, as well as internally displaced persons, refugees and migrants resulting from the impacts of climate and conflict, in addition to women and children.</p> <p>We did not notice any link to the contribution of conflict sensitivity approach-peace building in drylands. Some development reduces underlying vulnerabilities associated with conflict, and adaptation contributes by reducing the impacts of climate change on climate sensitive drivers of conflict. Will this be assessed as well? Please refer to this map prepared by FAO’s Hand in Hand Initiative for more information https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/8efcbd4edc5f4922be1ab51791c54015</p>	<p>contribution of conflict sensitivity approach-peace building in drylands. Language on how climate change and population growth can create conflicts has been added to paragraph 8. The indicator “Evidence/examples of conflict sensitivity approach application in GEF dryland interventions” and the related link to the cited fragility evaluation have been added to KQ4 in the evaluation matrix.</p>
GEF SEC	General Comment	<p>The approach paper doesn’t mention/discuss the Land Degradation Global Benefits Index (GBI). It is important for the evaluation to understand and consider that the LD STAR allocation for all countries includes a 0.6 weight for proportion of dryland area: https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.C.54.03_STAR_0.pdf The higher the proportion of drylands, the higher is the STAR allocation.</p>	<p>Addressed. Thanks for this useful suggestion. A new paragraph 11 referencing the LD GBI has been added.</p>
GEF SEC	Paragraph 10	<p>Consider including the GEF-PRC Partnership on Land Degradation in Dryland Ecosystems as an important and relevant example.</p>	<p>No action taken. The GEF PRC Drylands partnership is already discussed at paragraph 23.</p>
GEF SEC	Paragraph 21	<p>This notion of “underfunding” is misleading in the GEF context. As the IEO is well aware, GEF programming is country driven. The GEF cannot direct countries’ programming, it can only provide opportunities / entry points / incentives, however, the priorities that countries chose to invest is decided by countries. Further, as mentioned above, the LD GBI in fact points to the opposite, that dryland countries are allocated comparably more funding than other countries.</p>	<p>Addressed. A full discussion on underfunding can be found at paragraph 67 of the SFM evaluation report. Footnote 12 has been added in the paragraph to indicate that GEF programming is country driven.</p>
GEF SEC	Paragraph 21	<p>“The [SFM IP] evaluation found this program [the DSL IP] fragmented despite its exclusive focus on the world drylands”. I don’t recall such a finding in this</p>	<p>Addressed. References to a fragmented programmatic approach have been deleted.</p>

⁵ IPCC. Climate change and land, <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>

		evaluation. In any case, it is incorrect, especially when considering the context (limited funding available) and the selection criteria for child projects.	
GEF SEC	Paragraph 22	“how and why when the GEF intervenes in drylands”. Again, the GEF doesn’t “intervene” in drylands. It’s the countries choice to make how, why, and when they intervene in their dryland areas.	Addressed. Changed to “... how and why in dryland areas”
GEF SEC	Paragraph 27	While the objectives of the evaluation are clear, the purpose is not fully clear. The evaluation has a large scope (covering more than 50 countries and 229 projects including MTF and LCCF projects) – what, exactly, are the specific environmental issues in this cohort of countries that are different from other GEF countries?	Addressed. Specific challenges are described in section 2: water scarcity, climate variability, land degradation, desertification, and drought. They have been added to paragraph 38.
GEF SEC	Paragraph 31	“recent findings point at unaddressed critical dryland forest ecosystems and at a fragmented programmatic approach” Which findings? What means unaddressed? And what fragmented programmatic approach? This requires clarification, IEO shouldn’t go into the evaluation based on these assumptions.	Partially addressed. References to a fragmented programmatic approach have been deleted. The finding of unaddressed critical forest ecosystems is reported at paragraph 116 of the SFM evaluation report .
GEF SEC	Paragraph 38	“drylands-related issues/themes”. What are those, exactly? If this is kept vague, the evaluation will not be able to draw specific and meaningful conclusions.	Addressed. Issues are the same discussed in section 2. They have been added to paragraph 38.
GEF SEC	Paragraph 41	“Evaluation matrix composed of the five key questions”. Only question 1 appears to be specific to dryland issues, but still without specifying which issues, exactly, the evaluation will look into. The other 4 questions are relevant in any country, regardless of arid or humid. What is the purpose of looking into general issues such as sustainability, gender, resilience, policy coherence in a subset of GEF countries that happen to have a high share of drylands. Are differences expected or will comparisons be made to humid countries?	No action taken. While the questions may be relevant to any country category, they may generate different answers and learning. The evaluation matrix indicates (KQ3, Methodology) that a comparative rating analysis will be conducted between different cohorts of dryland situations (dry sub-humid, semi-arid, arid, etc.) by region, Agency, intervention typology. We will look into the feasibility of comparing with other countries categories.