

An Analysis of Coordinating and Implementing United Nations' Policy on
Land Degradation and Tenure

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Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of international policy and the coordination and implementation processes involved. The research was a two-pronged approach, the first being a literature review on the previous integration of the land degradation neutrality (LDN) and the voluntary guidelines on tenure (VGGT). The second prong was an observational study of internal United Nations policy creation actions from the perspective of a United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Intern. The literature review yielded interesting critiques on previous policies and the complexity of integration and recognition of existing infrastructures. The observational study found that bureaucracy and generalized solutions continue to hinder effective international policy. From these findings, this thesis proposes a new structure for the United Nations to create more individualized and effective policies which are targeted toward sub-regions and not one large encompassing solution. This proposed idea can allow for successful long-term implementation and benefits.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research Questions, Aim, and Objective

When assessing the best practices in addressing land degradation neutrality and land tenure, policies integrating both aspects are the most effective in combating human rights and environmental issues. The main objective of this Honours Thesis was to understand proper policy implementation and the merging of policies in the realm of land rights and land degradation to better understand the two processes. This would aid in building a foundation of knowledge to support the creation of more effective and nationally appropriate policies that are structured with durable implementation processes and account for pre-existing infrastructures. As well, with my position as a United Nations Intern, I was able to further assess current international policy structures which lead to this thesis. Moreover, the aim of this thesis was to investigate the ecosystem of international policy coordination and locally accommodating programme implementation, specifically the UN's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)* and FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure (VGGT). LDN focuses on the prevention of further land degradation and restoration of degraded land, while the VGGT focuses on proper and clear tenure rights. Both of these policies will be further explained in the coming sections. This aim and objective structured the four research questions driving this analysis;

1. What aspects of previous implementations of LDN and VGGT have been considered successful?
2. What were the shortcomings of previous LDN and VGGT policy integration?
3. How are two policies, on separate topics, combined and transformed to match all parties' needs?
4. How does the UN's perception of the success of their work impact the effectiveness of the policy produced?

Beyond the findings to support better policy creation and implementation processes, this thesis aimed to fill the gap in the literature on understanding what specific mechanisms of policy caused success and failures in implementation and merging structures. Due to the context-

dependent nature of the topic, this review assessed the policy itself, and not the individual case-by-case as different nations have varying external factors that affect policy. For instance, this review attempted to see if the policy had successful mechanisms in place to account for external factors and not how each individual external factor affected the policy.

1.2 Background Information on Land Tenure and VGGT

Land is more than a physical entity to be used or inhabited. It can be assessed through different lenses such as land as private property, as a public good, or as a sense of place (UNCCD et al., 2018). Land itself is a complex subject that contains pathways affecting and being affected by socioeconomic and environment influences. For instance, livelihoods, culture, migration, poverty, and resource availability. Beyond the physical land, systems of owning and tenure have an additional layer of complication when it is intersecting with land management and environmental protection. Land tenure, which is more significant and distinct from ownership, refers to the conditions under which land is held and inhabited (COP 14, 2019). Land tenure is much more connected to other aspects of life and culture than ownership. Secure land tenure rights significantly affect how environmentally aware the land is managed. Clearly defined tenure rights provide more responsibility and incentivization to take care of the land. This is because those who have secure tenure rights have individual access to the land and resources. This in turn creates a foundation of long-term stewardship and strengthens arguments against competing land claims (COP 14, 2019).

While there are numerous forms of land tenure, there are two main forms of tenure categorization: statutory and customary tenure. Statutory tenure refers to the more formal tenure arrangement of written or official tenure, although while statutory tenure is more “formal”, the type of tenure is less important than the amount of security their form of tenure provides (COP 14, 2019). Customary tenure is considered more informal and is usually unwritten and used by Indigenous communities and in traditional tenure types. While customary tenure is unofficial, it is utilized by roughly 1.5 billion people who are experiencing land degradation on their territory, most of which are small-scale farmers (COP 14, 2019). Land tenure is highly integrated into different spheres of society ranging from socioeconomic to cultural, especially when discussing

customary land tenure. This is why it is so complicated to create an international policy addressing very local experiences. Customary land tenure can be shaped by intergenerational land transmission practices (inheritance). Due to the variety in how inheritance occurs, there is variation *within* types of customary land tenure. This variety is caused by different cultural influences. These ethically distinct patterns create disputes between who has land tenure, this then creates issues surrounding the process of transferring tenure. Different cultures recognize different authorities of transmission. This can reduce the land tenure security for a group due to inconsistency (Salomon, 2010). Customary land tenure can be administered in accordance with local customs and through local authorities, which can involve more overlapping of land and ambiguous borders. However, these tenure structures also contain internal dispute resolution mechanisms and allow for tenure rights to range from individual to group rights and to who can use resources (COP 14, 2019).

Comparatively, statutory tenure contains much more codification of rights and formal documents with the use of state-provided institutions and enforcement procedures. This system is much more rigid with less ambiguity, as private holdings utilize documents specifying who has access (COP 14, 2019). Statutory tenure can use state tenure in which the state can allocate their holds on land rights to individuals, groups, or organizations. This is more of a hierarchical process than customary tenure (COP 14, 2019). Interestingly, while statutory does contain more formal laws, there is more confusion surrounding the specificities of what exact rights are held by whom, especially when allocated by the state, and for how long they hold these rights (COP 14, 2019). Neither form of tenure is less complicated than the other, which is one of the causes of complications when creating international programmes. Policy needs to aid in tenure security without infringing on the sovereignty of a community or state and how they manage who has tenure, or who is the steward of the land. However, it is this unknown and lack of tenure security experienced by parties that cause further land degradation. This is because of the lack of knowledge on what their rights entail or lack of incentivization to care for land. These conditions create motivation to extrapolate as many resources as possible before tenure is lost.

Tenure is highly integrated into more than solely land ownership discussions. It is critical in food security, sustainable development, human rights, and environmental sustainability. Knowing this,

the FAO after an intensive process involving over 1000 stakeholders, created the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) in May 2012 (Committee on World Food Security, 2016). The VGGT was the first inter-governmental consensus on the accepted standards to be used for responsible tenure governance for all levels and sectors (public and private) that use land (Committee on World Food Security, 2016). These voluntary guidelines contain the overarching goal of ensuring the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. However, this is to be completed through the process of providing guidance to improve tenure to land, fisheries, and forests (Committee on World Food Security, 2012). As previously discussed, having clear and secure tenure rights allows for explicit access to resources and reduces conflict due to ambiguity (Riggs et al., 2016).

VGGT recognizes the importance of secure land tenure and the context-dependent variation of tenure types, which is why they provide voluntary *guidelines* in order to create frameworks to aid in increasing transparency and functioning of pre-existing tenure systems (Committee on World Food Security, 2012). As such, they should be interpreted and applied within the existing institutions and responsibilities under national and international law, in order to respond to regionally- and culturally-specific issues. Moreover, when addressing customary and statutory law, VGGT recognizes both with equal standing of legitimacy and discusses the importance of preventing infringement of tenure rights of others (Committee on World Food Security, 2012). While one of the overarching themes of VGGT is food security through land tenure, this can only be ensured through the reduction of environmental (or land) degradation, which can be exacerbated by a lack of clear tenure rights and conflicts arising over land. Through increasing transparency, legitimacy and security of tenure through proposed frameworks, land degradation should decrease as well, acting as the main mechanism to achieve food security.

1.3 Background Information on Land Degradation and LDN

The connection between land tenure and environmental issues varies in setting, however, one consistent connector is land degradation. Land degradation refers to the deterioration and reduction of biological and economic productivity of land and the destruction of vegetation cover (Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, 1997). While this is not

a new issue, the level of land degradation has been increasing globally and has extreme environmental and socioeconomic ramifications, as seen in the VGGT discussion. In the environmental field, land degradation can lead to grain shortage, biodiversity loss, and can weaken an ecosystem's ability to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adapt to the environmental shift (Jiang et al., 2020). This can cause a loss in biomass and organic matter creating a positive feedback loop of releasing more carbon into the atmosphere, exacerbating climate change, and further affecting the land. As well, land degradation continues to negatively affect the soil's ability to retain water and nutrients, thus reducing the quality and creating a stressed environment for vegetation (Jiang et al., 2020). Beyond the environmental impacts, there are direct and indirect consequences on population and livelihoods. Land degradation can cause production capacity to decline, reducing the available food, and increasing population migration in order to find more habitable land that is less degraded (Jiang et al., 2020).

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) defines land degradation neutrality as, “a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remain stable or increase within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems” (Science-Policy Interface, 2017). LDN itself is a paradigm for managing land degradation in order to ensure the land's resources are sufficient enough to continue sustainable ecosystem services. These services include adequate food, water and climate regulation in order to mitigate environmental impacts and allow for community resilience. This vision of LDN has five main objectives: maintain or improve ecosystem services, maintain or improve productivity to enhance food security, increase the resilience of the land and populations dependent on the land, seek synergies with other environmental objectives, and reinforce responsible governance of land tenure (Science-Policy Interface, 2017). These objectives are well-matched with the purpose of the VGGT and have overlapping agendas, which creates a beneficial environment for the two initiatives to be merged.

To ensure sufficient steps for achieving LDN and meeting the five objectives, the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) has created operational terms and a framework to allow for practical implementation of the vision (Science-Policy Interface, 2017). This has been presented through the SPI's conceptual framework on LDN based on five modules; the vision of LDN,

frame of reference, mechanism for neutrality, achieving neutrality, and monitoring neutrality; as seen in Figure 1 produced by the UN. The centre mechanism of a scale demonstrates the pathway for achieving neutrality; balancing losses and gains of land degradation and positive action respectively (Science-Policy Interface, 2017). At the bottom of the figure, the hierarchy of importance for how to react to land degradation is to avoid, reduce, and finally reverse past degradation. This is in tandem with the arrow demonstrating the indicators of LDN through time of pre-emptively anticipating and planning to avoid and reduce new degradation while interpreting and adjusting to reverse past degradation.

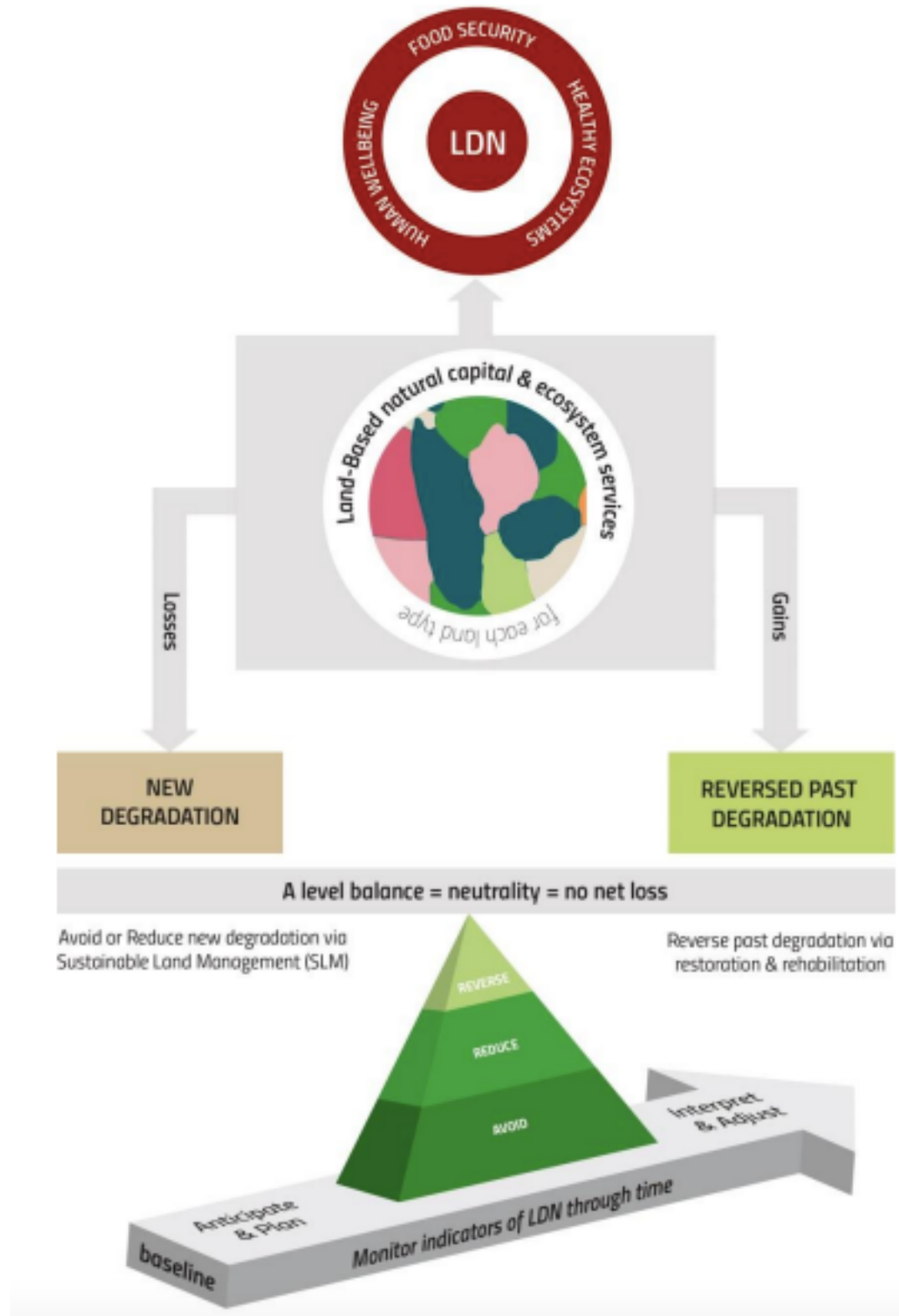


Figure 1. LDN Conceptual Framework (Science-Policy Interface, 2017)

Similar to VGGT, the LDN vision and conceptual framework for implementation is voluntary, and while the UNCCD has intended them for drylands, the resources and steps are applicable to all land types and ecosystems (Science-Policy Interface, 2017). While LDN can be quite complex in the assessment of neutrality and measurements of progress, there are three global LDN indicators provided with the encouragement to include additional country-specific indicators. The three indicators were selected because of their reflection of land-based ecosystems services, and they are land cover change, land productivity (net primary production), and soil organic carbon stocks (Science-Policy Interface, 2017). UNCCD has produced this multifaceted framework in order to attempt to encompass all aspects that pertain to land degradation. This is going beyond solely assessing the environmental connections, but delving into the population's impact and the variation in environment and human interactions.

Overall, LDN attempts to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation simultaneously, as land degradation has already occurred, is still occurring, however, future practices can be altered to avoid further environmental destruction. While this programme is all-encompassing in nature, it does account for existing infrastructures, and similarly to the VGGT, connects the implementation process of LDN to complement these pre-existing mechanisms. There are many similarities between LDN and VGGT, which link to the relationship between land tenure and degradation. These shared goals, processes, and foundational values create an ideal environment for these policies to work in tandem to fully combat land degradation and insecure tenure rights. However, as further addressed in this thesis, policy combination is more than the integration of two pieces of work, and policy implementation is more complicated than solely providing a base framework for nations to utilize. Both affairs deal with human interaction, maintenance of diplomacy, and an intensive understanding of national contexts and the processes of international cooperation on regionally accommodating policy work. Due to the inability of this policy process to be isolated and prescribed a specific regime to follow, the goal of this research is to understand the overarching trends to increase the transferability of findings to be used in other areas of policy coordination and implementation.

1.4 Outline of Thesis

While Chapter 1 addressed the background information on LDN, VGGT, land tenure, and land degradation, Chapter 2 explains the methodology used in both the systematic literature review and the observational study. Chapter 3 outlines the findings from both the literature review and the data collected from observations. Chapter 4 further elaborates on the significance of the findings and assesses them in tandem with previously found case studies. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a policy brief example and key points to be used in future policy implementation and coordination processes.

Chapter 2. Methods and Data Extraction

To best answer the proposed research questions, the research was split into two prongs of data collection; a systematic literature review and a participant observational study through the perspective of an intern for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The literature review focused on the implementation aspects of the policy by utilizing case studies and critical analyses of both LDN and VGGT to assess previous successes and shortcomings of the respective policies' implementations. This was intended to fill the gap in pre-existing literature in unpacking the context-dependent success of policy and aid in increasing the transferability of findings. The method of the systematic literature review was intended to answer the first and second questions through critiques and examples in order to provide background on what alterations should be made to the new policy. This aspect of the research was imperative in providing a strong foundation and holistic perspective of both the similarities in the respective policies' downfalls and where they overlap in their successes.

Comparatively, the participant observational research focused on the process of policy combination, pathways between UN bodies, and the structure of discourse surrounding the policy development. The data collected was intended to analyse the complex process of policy combination and the intricate ecosystem of the United Nations to gain a better understanding of the most effective form of collaborative policy work between separate bodies. This method was selected to answer the third and fourth research questions as there was little literature about the process itself. As well, the process of policy creation varies at the more senior levels because of the challenge in following a structured sequence of steps due to variation in bodies involved and desired outcomes. Through coalescing the findings of the literature review and participant observational research, this thesis was intended to aid in the development of effective and beneficial policy implementation and match context-specific issues.

3.1 Literature Review Search Strategy

The first search to be completed was solely looking at LDN policy and the effect, while the second search was completed with the same keywords but changed "LDN" to "VGGT" to allow

a catchment of specified papers. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the two searches were the same, only varying in whether the literature addressed LDN or VGGT. This process can be seen in Figure 2, the flowchart of selected literature.

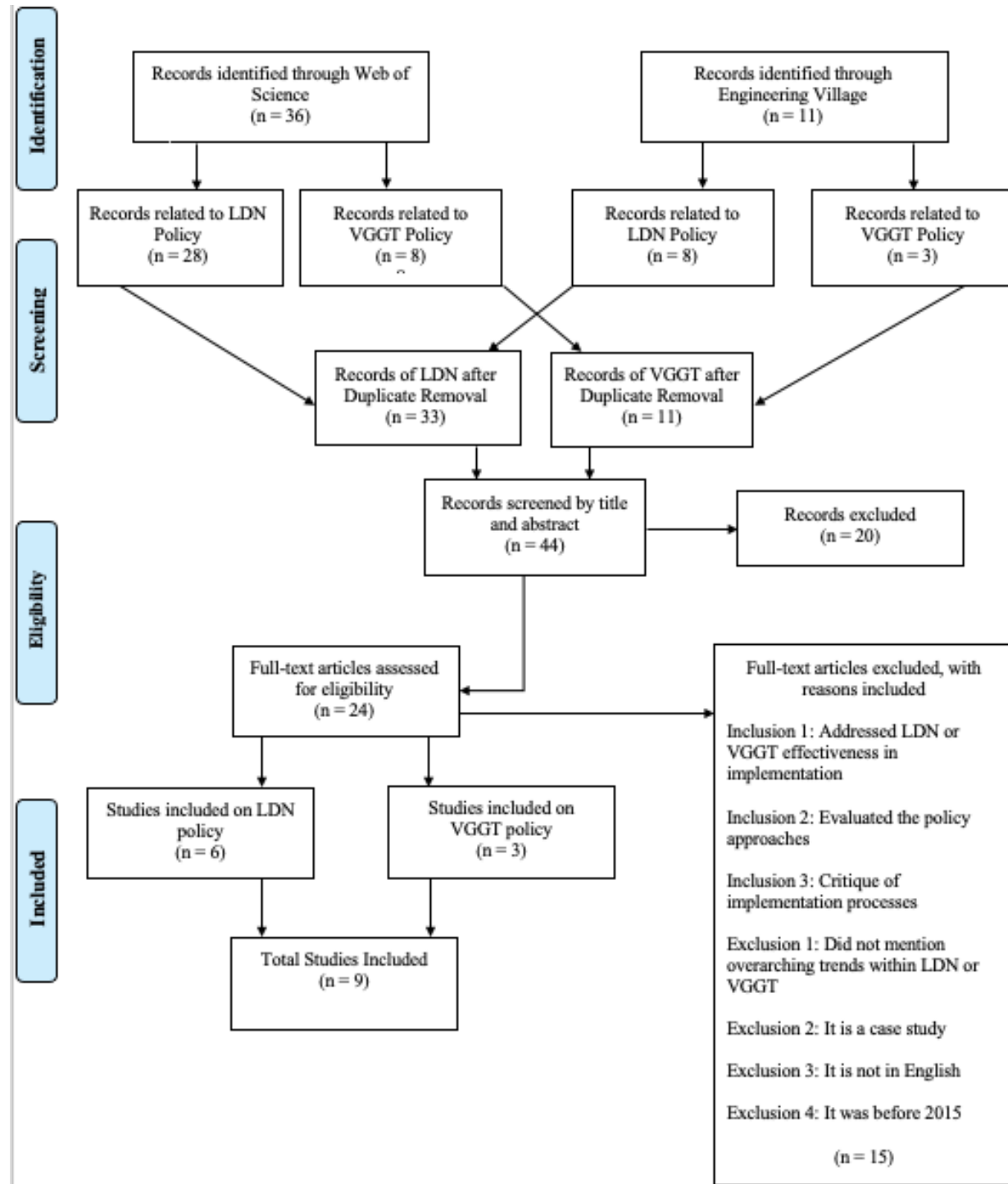


Figure 2. Flowchart of Literature Selection and Elimination Process (Source: Author)

A search was completed by using keywords in two separate databases under all fields of reference to find articles that were best related to the intended research questions; benefits and critiques of previous LDN and VGGT implementation. The two databases utilized in this review were Web of Science and GEOBASE Engineering Village. To ensure the search would yield articles specifically focusing on the policies' effect itself and the impact it had related to the specified program, keywords were selected to narrow the search findings. The keywords for LDN were; land degradation neutrality AND policy AND implementation. Similarly, the keywords for VGGT were; voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure AND policy AND implementation. When searching, full phrases were used due to acronyms minimizing search results and excluding related articles; this was found in both LDN and VGGT searches. The term "policy" was placed as a key term as the purpose of this review is to assess the success of the policy itself and not the surrounding land degradation or land tenure programmes related to the topic.

3.1.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This literature review was conducted by summarizing, analyzing, evaluating and then synthesizing the LDN and VGGT policy literature in order to demonstrate the impact of LDN and VGGT individually and compare their successes and downfalls (Onwuegbuzie, Frels, & Hwang, 2016). Due to the literature review focusing on the policy itself and its direct impact on the country's situation, the inclusion and exclusion criterion only accepted literature addressing the direct correlation between policy and effect. Literature that addressed LDN or VGGT effectiveness in implementation, evaluation of the policies' approaches, or critiques of the process were included in the literature assessed for the review. However, literature that was a case study and did not mention the overarching issues or trends within the policy process was excluded. This was because the policy implementation process is context-specific and this would impede the transferability of findings. Case studies were further analyzed in the discussion section to contextualize the findings of what mechanisms of the policy implementation process itself are beneficial and unsuccessful. As well, literature that was not in English or if it was published before 2015 was to be excluded. The exclusion date was set to only encompass more

recent issues that have been faced with this policy, as the actions governments are taking, the climate situation, and issues faced by nations are ever-changing.

3.2 Literature Data Extraction

Through initial findings from searches in both databases, articles were screened by their titles and abstracts to see if through a preliminary assessment they could be included in the literature. Once this first round of elimination was completed through EndNote, literature was scanned for duplicates and the full text was assessed for eligibility by the inclusion and exclusion criteria. However, once the selected literature was separated from the other articles, the case studies found were stored to aid in the contextualization of the findings.

Once the literature completed the elimination process and was selected to be included in the literature review, data was extracted into an excel sheet and categorized into findings in order to ease analysis. The findings were first categorized into two separate charts; either assessing LDN or VGGT. After this, the further categorization in the charts was, the date of publication, implementation critiques, implementation benefits, external factors affecting the process, and finally, further suggestions. This information was found through full-text analysis of the chosen literature, although some of the borders between findings were ambiguous, such as between external factors' effects and critiques and benefits. However, this was placed as a separate category in order to identify any recurring parties (communities, NGOs, pre-existing infrastructures, etc.) that were continuously altering the policy implementation process. This separation of data aided in the isolation of key factors and to evaluate if issues in implementation are about the policy structure itself or if it was about the interaction between policy and place and a lack of complementary mechanisms.

After data categorization, findings related to policy implementation were assessed for any recurring and overarching trends of issues and successes and cross-correlated with previous case studies found to compare nation-specific experiences. These final findings were then compared to the observational research findings on policy combination in order to make connections between issues previously occurring in implementation processes and coordination pathways.

This was in order to assess if issues found in the coordination of policy combination lead to issues in policy implementation *or* if unknown issues in the previous implementation affect the current policy combination and understanding of impact.

3.3 Observational Research Methods

The second prong of the methods is the observational study that had the main objective of answering the third and fourth questions and further examining the circumstances surrounding policy coordination and combination between different bodies of the UN. This is to complement the systematic literature review. The review is analyzing *previous* policy implementation to examine the process, while the observations are of *current* policy coordination to understand the present system of work. The method of qualitative research collection is closest to ethnographic research and was combined with overt and disclosed participant observational research that uses event sampling to collect data. This observational research was conducted from the perspective of being a UNCCD Intern focusing on carrying out the previous Convention of the Parties (COP) decision by the UN parties. This was the selected choice of observational methods in order to understand the UN from an internal perspective and assess the interactions that drive decisions and the direction of how this policy is being constructed and by whom.

The collection of data was done through attending online meetings and tracking trends, interactions, and overarching pathways of coordination to combine LDN and VGGT through the scope of understanding from a new internal perspective. The information to be tracked was decided before the observations began to categorize the findings and add ease to the analysis process. The notes and data recorded will be using Chatham House Rules, the primary rule being no identification of the speakers is allowed; they remain anonymous (Chatham House, 2021). While this method may be considered unconventional for research, it is a regular occurrence in the realm of creating policy and coordinating ideas, as it involves the epistemic community general discussion (Haas, 2017).

3.4 Observational Data Extraction

Due to the qualitative nature of the data being collected, information was categorized into sections in order to better analyze findings to draw conclusions. Observations from the online internal meetings were recorded in a notebook and subsequently categorized into one of three columns of information; structure of the policy coordination process, internal interactions between groups, and personal critiques and questions. The borders between these findings do overlap as some findings are ambiguous in which category they fall under, however, the entire process is interconnected and data extracted will be of a similar nature.

Following the categorization of data extraction, overarching trends and analyses were assessed in tandem with the foundational information found in the systematic literature review. For instance, assessing the findings from the literature review and comparing the previous successes and critiques of LDN and VGGT to observations of current processes to understand the UN's perception of their work. This comparison of data was able to answer the final question; how does the UN's perception of the success of their work impact the effectiveness of the policy produced? It should be noted that due to the fact that this policy is still underway, there are other documents and policies that are relevant and I am unable to mention in my observations due to UN restrictions making the documents public.

3.5 Risk of Bias in Literature Choice and Observational Data Collection

Pertaining to the literature review, there was a self-selection bias, as not all data relating to the effectiveness of LDN and VGGT policy implementation were used, only literature found in Web of Science and GEOBASE Engineering Village. As well, there was a publication bias of more significant findings and critiques of LDN and VGGT being published, which can shift the perception of the benefits and shortcomings of the policies' implementation processes.

Furthermore, there was a bias in my own scope and understanding of what was counted as a critique and what was a positive impact arising from a policy being integrated into a country's context. When conducting the observational data collection, due to the method being participant observations, there was the possibility of losing objectivity and gaining bias due to preconceived ideas of the UN. However, this may be small and less significant as the observations were intended to be my perspective. Moreover, the selection of relevant data in reference to the chosen

categories was able to have a bias on what was considered most important for the process of policy coordination.

3.6 Positionality as a Researcher

Pertaining to my positionality when conducting this research, I found it was important to recognize the systemic western perspectives that have shaped my academic perception, and how this shaped my understanding of what themes were relevant in this literature review. Moreover, it was important to recognize that I am a white-passing, cis-gendered female that lives in a highly economically developed country, and I was addressing issues that affect marginalized communities in nations across the world. As well, regardless of my position as an Intern, I would be considered an insider. This is due to my status as an academic, UN Intern, my access to resources, and my ability to understand jargon (Valentine, 2002). However, I am an outsider when it comes to addressing and analyzing the issues marginalized groups face with their livelihoods and the connection to LDN and VGGT. My positionality in this research was about both how I was viewed by the UN participants, but also how my background affected my perception and interaction with information and others. I am privileged to have an academic background that provides me access to this realm of policy and allows me to conduct this research.

Chapter 3. Results

3.1 Results from Literature Review

As seen in the methods section, this search retrieved 47 papers total through the Web of Science and Engineering Village related to either LDN or VGGT implementation. After the preliminary screening of literature through assessing titles and abstracts and removing duplicates, there were 24 articles remaining. After this process, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the full text of the articles leaving only nine applicable to the intended research questions. Out of these nine studies, three were related to the implementation of VGGT and six were related to LDN implementation. No article was a case study and all chosen pieces discussed and related back to the implementation process of their respective policy. Through conducting this in-depth literature review, it was found that many implementation critiques are intrinsically related to the policy itself, creating some ambiguity in the findings. This understanding that the policy itself is what creates a successful implementation process will be further analyzed within the discussion section. All findings in the literature review can be seen in *Chart 1. Literature Review Findings* in the appendix section.

3.1.1 Findings on Implementation Policy Critiques and Benefits for VGGT

Every article provided a different analysis of the policies presented, however, there were recurring factors that appeared to be the most prominent in impact on the implementation process. Two out of the three articles relating to VGGT found that the “soft law” nature of the VGGT while being beneficial, created issues in the legitimacy of the policy being implemented (Jansen, 2020; Kramer et al., 2021). While international bodies such as UNCCD and FAO cannot enforce legal obligations, the soft law nature of the VGGT without incentivization was challenging and created many implementation barriers. Comparatively, Jansen also mentions the importance of soft law to allow for nations to elaborate on the initiative under their own hard law and the non-stifling implementation process this allows (Jansen, 2020). This continues to not infringe on national sovereignty *and* allows for nations to alter the VGGT process as they see fit. Moreover, all articles presented the critique that the lack of a strong monitoring system leads

to uncoordinated implementation (Beckh et al., 2015; Kramer et al., 2021; Jansen, 2020). Without an explicit monitoring system on who should be monitoring what, nations have no way to effectively implement long-term and ensure the positive impact of the VGGT (Beckh et al., 2015). Articles found that structure is a necessary factor in policy and effective implementation, as without it processes become bureaucratic and problematic.

The critique discussed in all three articles pertaining to the VGGT was the complexity of stakeholder issues. While stakeholders are an essential aspect of implementation, Kramer found there was a lack of obligation for stakeholders to be human rights-focused (Kramer et al., 2021). This idea was supported by other VGGT analyses finding that top-down multi-stakeholder platforms lack local context and create power imbalances that exacerbate representation issues, as they do not have inclusive processes (Jansen, 2020; Beckh et al., 2015). However, Jansen also mentions the effective implementation of VGGT that occurs when stakeholders use bottom-up approaches (Jansen, 2020). The majority of the critiques appear to be rooted in a lack of resources for implementation and Parties' abilities to manipulate the VGGT processes. The final benefit of the VGGT in implementation was the understanding of pre-existing laws and rights (Jansen, 2020; Kramer et al., 2021). When working with an issue as sensitive as tenure, VGGT did have an understanding of customary and informal rights (Jansen, 2020). Beckh found that implementation was most successful when nations were already incentivized to use VGGT, connecting to previous understanding of soft law functions (Beckh et al., 2015).

3.1.2 Findings on Implementation Policy Critiques and Benefits for LDN

The critiques of LDN were very similar to those of VGGT, especially when addressing the complexities of a monitoring system and stakeholder involvement. Three articles analyzed the current monitoring process and the lack of guidance for the nations attempting to implement LDN (Allen et al., 2020; Chasek et al., 2019; Cowie et al., 2018). Chasek and Allen's analysis demonstrated the lack of synergy with pre-existing structures in nations on monitoring land degradation, as well as the challenges that arise for long-term implementation (Allen et al., 2020; Chasek et al., 2019). Chasek demonstrated that providing an effective monitoring system for LDN will allow governments and other stakeholders to have clear communication and guidance,

and this is something the current LDN structure does not have (Chasek et al., 2019).

Alternatively, Cowie discusses how the current framework for LDN allows customization for countries by allowing them to set individualized baselines to measure improvement. This piece also expresses that while there is a current monitoring framework, there is still progress needed in the mechanism to allow for more indicators for Parties to measure improvement (Cowie et al., 2018). A continuous and reliable monitoring system allows for implementation processes to be adapted to the local context (Cowie et al., 2018).

When discussing multi-stakeholder platforms, findings are quite similar to those of VGGT. Stakeholders in LDN were mixed in impact, as lack of incentivization led to issues of involvement (Chasek et al., 2019). Unlike the frequently discussed issues of stakeholders and the inequity of power dynamics found in VGGT, LDN requires better guidelines for what stakeholders are needed. Akhtar-Schuster discusses the differences in land degradation prevention actions, such as rehabilitation and restoration, that require different stakeholders. Currently, LDN policy guidelines are ambiguous on where specific stakeholders are required to help and the different actions required for varying levels of degraded land (Akhtar-Schuster et al., 2016). This finding of unclear guidelines and inadequate rules was also found in Allen's analysis and leads to uncoordinated implementation (Allen et al., 2020). However, Metternicht did find the guiding questions beneficial in national integration processes as they increased the understanding of LDN (Metternicht et al., 2019).

Chasek and Van Haren discuss the smaller stakeholders of the local communities that require more engagement and the lack of local officials integrated and incentivized to aid in LDN initiatives (Chasek et al., 2019; van Haren et al., 2019). While the LDN policy does utilize pre-existing data on SLM (Sustainable Land Management) technology and connects to the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), there is a lack of quantitative data and information for countries with varying landscapes (Metternicht et al., 2019). LDN focuses on land degradation and Akhtar-Schuster found the lack of human-centred structure an issue as land is an interconnected subject that goes beyond environmental impact (Akhtar-Schuster et al., 2016). This sentiment was echoed in Allen's analysis of LDN where it was explained the current policy

does not focus on land tenure; an integral part of preventing further land degradation (Allen et al., 2020).

3.1.4 External Factors Affecting VGGT and LDN Implementation

External factors affecting both VGGT and LDN were highly integrated into the other aspects of the policies, which created some ambiguity in the findings. However, beyond the policies' structure, external factors have the ability to create challenging implementation environments. Both Kramer and Beckh discuss the importance of third parties when pertaining to the VGGT. Third parties have the ability to infringe on land rights due to the lack of proper legislation in the nation, creating a complex system to navigate in VGGT implementation (Kramer et al., 2021). Contrary to this, third parties are also seen as vital stakeholders to convince governments to properly implement and monitor VGGT and are currently not used (Beckh et al., 2015). Reactions to third parties and their involvement vary as nations experience different issues. Third parties are complicated but essential when focusing on the implementation of a new international policy, especially when they have an understanding of the local context. The VGGT was also criticized for the lack of recognition of barriers such as socioeconomic, political, legal, cultural and administrative (Kramer et al., 2021). These barriers were accentuated by the soft law nature of VGGT, as it does not surpass national rules and as such cannot overcome all obstacles (Jansen, 2020).

LDN analysis demonstrated the largest external factor affecting implementation was the lack of monetary resources. Financial barriers and lack of investment, paired with a lack of political will created large barriers to the implementation of LDN (Allen et al., 2020; Chasek et al., 2019; Metternicht et al., 2019; van Haren et al., 2019). The lack of high-level commitment found for LDN can be caused by the lack of education on the cross-sectoral benefits and technical aspects (Allen et al., 2020; Chasek et al., 2019; van Haren et al., 2019). One finding was particularly interesting as technically it was an external factor for LDN, but internally related to the UN and other international bodies; the lack of synergy between multilateral environmental agreements (Akhtar-Schuster et al., 2016; Chasek et al., 2019). This uncoordinated implementation created

unnecessary bureaucracy and complicated communication between governments, local authorities, communities, and those evaluating LDN (Chasek et al., 2019).

3.1.4 Findings on Further Suggestions for VGGT

Interestingly, the largest amount of information collected from the literature review on the VGGT was pertaining to further suggestions on how to better the implementation process. The main suggestions on implementation is related to the framework of the policy itself, whether that be adjusting the core so it is a human rights based approach, ensuring clarity for parties actions, or providing explicit accountability and monitoring framework based on pre-existing binding commitments (Beckh et al., 2015; Jansen, 2020; Kramer et al., 2021). In order to have a successful implementation, the policy itself must have the integration process implemented within and be inclusive in the application. Kramer discusses how a human rights-based approach would provide better support and aid in the legitimacy of the VGGT, making sure that stakeholders and all parties involved in the community are willing to accept the policy (Kramer et al., 2021).

Frequently discussed is the need for long-term implementation support through a monitoring mechanism. However, it was suggested that this monitoring would be most successful if it is based on existing commitments that are *binding* to counteract the soft law nature of the VGGT (Jansen, 2020; Kramer et al., 2021). Moreover, Jansen touches upon how monitoring is required at all levels of implementation to ensure successful integration. As well, as to how the FAO should not be the one monitoring, but this should be done by regional and national stakeholders who understand the local context (Jansen, 2020). Not only would this possibly remove *some* of the top-down nature that occurs in the UN, but it would also force stakeholders to be involved and thus implementation can be more successful. Beckh states that both incentivization and diversity of stakeholders is needed. This would allow for more community ties and make the process of integrating the VGGT more cohesive (Beckh et al., 2015). Finally, further financial aid would allow more support and information sharing on both bad and good practices and would aid in Parties' ability to implement and avoid previous mistakes (Beckh et al., 2015). This

idea of sharing a nation's mistakes is unlike previous UN practices and they would have to expand their idea of diplomatic behaviour.

3.1.5 Findings on Further Suggestions for LDN

There was an overlap in the findings in the suggestions for further implementation between LDN and the VGGT. This was to be predicted as both LDN and the VGGT are considered soft law and as such have similar limitations and benefits. For instance, LDN suggestions also mentioned the need for a stronger monitoring system and an investment strategy in order for the policy to have a better sustained long-term impact. Cowie, Chasek, and Allen all suggested that monitoring LDN progress through indicators as well as anticipating the loss and gains would allow for Parties to be more aware and better prepared to integrate LDN (Allen et al., 2020; Chasek et al., 2019; Cowie et al., 2018). Moreover, while in an ideal world these policies would be able to be implemented without financial strain, this is not possible and LDN does require more monetary resources. Chasek suggests having funds pre-allocated because processes that require financing can be predicted (Chasek et al., 2019). This recommendation is supported by Metternicht's findings on providing institutional support to capitalize on the connections between LDN goals and market-based instruments, which would incentivize investments (Metternicht et al., 2019). Another overlap between policy suggestions is the need to work with pre-existing multilateral environmental agreements to reduce bureaucracy and reinforce LDN (Akhtar-Schuster et al., 2016; Chasek et al., 2019).

LDN focuses on the prevention of worsening the physical environment, but it also has to consider the societal aspects that are attached to the land. By understanding local context and by zoning areas based on both socioeconomic and biophysical status, LDN would be able to provide better-specified policy recommendations that make integration easier (Akhtar-Schuster et al., 2016; Metternicht et al., 2019). This idea would allow for less bureaucracy during the actual implementation and allow nations more guidance on how to handle regions with a high variety of zones. While both policies received recommendations on improving guidelines, LDN was recommended to provide instructions on what day-to-day operations would look like. Many policies provide end goals and pathways on how to achieve these, however, there is a lack of

instructions on what this looks like in a local daily context (Chasek et al., 2019). Understandably, this information is challenging to provide for nations with how the UN currently introduces policy and their desire to not infringe on national sovereignty. However, without the information on the steps to achieve LDN, nations may miss vital information and make critical mistakes.

There are a variety of findings that pertain to both LDN and the VGGT as they have similar processes of implementation, use similar stakeholders, and both deal with topics surrounding land. From the findings, it appears as though the four large recurring factors would be, the need for monitoring mechanisms, more cohesion between existing multilateral frameworks and stakeholders, specification of solutions for Parties, and financing and incentivization. An implementation process can only be successful if the policy itself has considered the intersectional impact it may have and how its desired goal can be achieved in that local context.

3.2 Observational Findings

3.2.1 Observational Findings on Structure of Policy Coordination Process and Internal Interactions

When conducting my research, as stated in the methods section, all information was collected with Chatham House rules. When collecting the observation they were originally written down in a notebook and then later categorized in *Chart 2. Observational Findings*, which can be found in the appendix section. The observations were collected during my time as a UNCCD Intern, as I had an internal perspective of the processes surrounding the international policy. This was a six-month duration starting from September 7th, 2021 and ending on March 7th, 2022. However, the observations recorded are not during every meeting, as information became repetitive, but it is clear there are trends throughout the findings, as well as a development in understanding from my perspective. I was able to answer some of my own questions or if I wasn't, it led me to interesting findings of the policy coordination process. The observations are of the process of policy coordination in order to combine both land tenure and land degradation neutrality initiatives known as the VGGT and LDN, respectively. In order to better understand the information collected, the observations were placed into one of three sections; structure of the

policy coordination process, internal interactions and personal critiques and questions. While there is some overlap between the first two categories, the differentiation is in the structure of policy coordination within the bounds of how the UN functions, while the internal interactions are more on the social and professional dynamics. However, to better explain the results the structural and internal interaction findings will be discussed in tandem.

At the beginning of collecting data, information was set behind barriers due to a lack of knowledge surrounding how the UNCCD functions, and the relationships between UN bodies, agencies, and conventions. As well, the presence of external stakeholders in the policy process and my understanding of how professionalism and diplomacy overlap took time to comprehend. During the month of October, my observations were surrounding the beginning of my understanding of the coordination process. For instance, while I saw that decisions obviously could not be made unilaterally, the coordination between the convention (UNCCD) and agency (FAO) became challenging when timelines were not completely aligned. As well, from my observation, it appeared as though there were internal crossovers requiring many clarifications and justifications for decisions on how to edit and add to the official UN documents for the COP. Understandably, this process is very collaborative and requires in-depth conversations and during meetings, I observed a lot of coordination between different involved parties. However, at times I did observe that the collaboration became hindering when conversations were less about the current pre-decided plan of action and more of a conversation about what needed to be done. As many decisions are decided as a group, it did add extra time and effort to tasks being completed. I saw that beyond the UN resources, external organizations do aid in many aspects that go into creating supporting documents and preparing for the COP. While there were many small things that appeared to lead to unnecessary bureaucracy, there was a lot of coordination required when integrating pre-existing policies between two sectors of the UN. Coordination is not only between FAO and UNCCD, but also internal coordination between UNCCD specified groups, external organizations, Parties, and other national focal points. While the UN is known for top-down processes, there is a large integration of groups at the “top”.

A recurring factor within my early observations was the importance of wording and diplomacy in internal interactions. UN official documents are required to be versatile, comprehensive, and

applicable to all nations; meaning it cannot isolate certain groups. I found that when working with these documents there is an emphasis on the difference between an “and” or an “or”, as it means the difference between a nation agreeing to work with the policy or not. I observed that this crucial aspect of the UNCCD’s work translated into how the sectors communicated. For instance, as UNCCD is not the sole group working on the official documents, whenever changes were made, they were not only passed back and forth between the agency and convection but were highly debated. Small words shifted to synonyms, new headings, and placement of information had to be approved by all and created this process I described as “ping-ponging back and forth”.

Beyond the documents and internal work, my observations surrounding the attendees of the COP yielded interesting results. My findings on October 27th, 2021 remarked on how the structure of policy coordination goes beyond the internal interactions. UNCCD would work with COP attendees to ensure they were not only educated about the topic of land tenure and degradation, as well as the connection between the two but also to prepare support for the policy during the COP. The Secretariat's work is based on the previous COP decision; their sole purpose is to support the Parties. However, they do need to garner support *before* the COP to ensure vital documents are passed and implemented.

In November and December, my observations were able to be made with a better understanding of the UNCCD processes. For instance, while earlier I noted the level of bureaucracy due to logistical confusion, I began to understand that at a level this high in creating policy it becomes challenging to follow a specific structure. As well, the discussion-based meetings are essential in combining collective knowledge on both the subject and the process of how to create an effective document for Parties. This observation of less structure I also saw within the moving timeline, as it is not just one organization focusing on the documents, but has to account for external groups as well. Connecting back to my previous observations on diplomacy and how information is presented, I found that during webinars it was essential to present information in a digestible manner. This was the same reason as previously to ensure there is known support of documents *before* entering the COP. Alliances are essential for support and I saw that educating and getting feedback became a large aspect of our work. Interestingly, while some of the feedback was

beneficial, the feedback that did not change anything drastic was still included in order to maintain that relationship with groups attending the COP. As well, I noticed that during the policy coordination process there was a unanimous decision to use only positive case studies as examples to both provide optimism for success and to not alienate any nations. However, I did provide critiques on this that will be discussed in later results.

During the months of January and February, the internal interactions and coordination process was now focused more on the final stage of editing and preparations, as all feedback and preparatory information had been gathered. Many of the observations were similar to those of the other stages, however, there was more of an emphasis that all actions relating to the policy connected back to the previous COP decisions and mandate. I saw that while we had more time to fine-tune aspects it also created interesting discussion surrounding what would and would not be included in the document and why. For instance, in late January and early February, I noted that information shared back and forth became overwhelming at times and that there was an effort to synthesize and understand who is most qualified for tasks. Additionally, the internal process became more complicated when discussing issues such as gender and how it should be worded in the document. Topics such as Indigenous and local communities and gender become complicated to discuss without isolating certain countries. They are deeply integrated into the documents and used in the foundation, however, these topics are presented in a way that is not contentious and will not cause debate to veer from land tenure and degradation. I found that this was one of the most interesting conversations I was privy to, as it brought about many questions surrounding the ability the UN has to make change and the unseen barriers in creating policy. The final coordination aspect I did see was the effort to synergise with pre-existing UN documents and initiatives that pertain to LDN and theVGGT.

3.2.2 Observational Findings on My Personal Critiques and Questions

I went into this observational study with a critical eye as someone who was new to the UN and wanted to understand the internal processes. While many of my observations and questions were answered or partially answered along the way, some critiques I had were left not completely explained. One large recurring personal critique I had of the coordination process was the

understanding of diplomacy and professionalism. The UN is a very diplomatic organization and prides itself on the inclusion of a diverse set of nations. However, I found that their understanding of diplomacy created a barrier to communication as critiques were veiled in order to not offend other portfolios. This was inherently tied to my view of the “ping-ponging” back and forth between groups, instead of explicit feedback and communication. I noted that diplomacy should allow for groups to disagree and communicate while providing new solutions and not be a hindrance to achieving success. My observations in October noted that some of the previously mentioned bureaucracy felt unnecessary and could be mitigated by slight changes and a clearer delineation of tasks. However, this is to be said that my observations were only during meetings and I was not privy to others’ daily tasks and outside work. Moreover, in my notes, it is clear that the bureaucracy was not a single instance, but one that appeared to obstruct the policy coordination process. Many small things are able to slow down the overall process, but it does beg the question of if the process is inherently flawed?

On November 11th, 2021, I did note that aspects of policy coordination are balancing multiple aspects from social to professional and ensuring the information is correct. UNCCD and FAO are both working with Parties, CSOs and other stakeholders involved in the COP and as such need to have an informative policy that is vague enough to be applied to all nations. This observation was interesting to me as it was the early stages of my realization that the current process is inherently flawed, but the intention, information, and resources behind it are useful. On January 11th, 2022, I had the largest amount of critiques and questions on the current policy process, as it seemed to impede the UN's goal. Many resources are placed into a document when there is hope all Parties will be using it, but also a recognition that may not be the case. Should there not be a reallocation of resources in order to create nation-specific solutions that will reduce the need for all-encompassing policies? While interning with UNCCD I understood the usefulness of this document, as having vital information on how to prevent land tenure issues and land degradation is essential. However, I began observing how being within a process creates blinders in understanding how a change in said process may be beneficial. Generalized solutions with all the information available for each situation in one location can seem positive but can be overwhelming and prevent Parties from accessing needed tools. I noticed the number of connections UNCCD has to nations and focal points, and how these can possibly be used to work

with nations to create specialized solutions. These would then not infringe on national sovereignty as they were created by said nation.

Many of my previous observations on internal interactions and the structure of policy coordination discuss the importance placed on words. However, my observational critiques did question if the overjustification of decisions created more bureaucracy than necessary. The wording of the documents is incredibly important, however, at times I saw that conversations would continue on a singular word when a decision had been made at the beginning of the discussion. This may be because of the need to justify every small decision made when working with such a high-level document, but at times it appeared to hold back further conversation. My final observations surrounding critiques were largely focused on certain decisions of wording and what to include and exclude. I found a large critique I had was the justification to use certain terminology solely because it had been used in previous documents. To me, this did not feel as though it was a strong argument, especially in a progressive space where groups involved are actively working to create change. In my observations, I noted the understanding that not every issue can be discussed in one policy and when it is as intersectional as this one, boundaries must be drawn. Nevertheless, it did appear at times that while this policy has the ability to be effective it can be equally performative if the main goal is to get Parties to agree and not to follow through. This observation was counteracted by the understanding that the first step *is* to get the Parties to agree and there are many processes after. My observational critiques were mainly surrounding the issues of bureaucracy but did touch upon the policy itself and the issues within as it did result in many discussions ending in compromise. Diplomacy and compromise are highly integrated and are involved in many of the policy coordination processes, which will be further elaborated within the discussion section.

Chapter 4. Discussion

4.1 Importance of Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

The literature review yielded a comprehensive list of results and through the categorization, there were clear trends within the findings of recurring issues and suggestions for implementation. As the implementation process is incredibly diverse, the importance of these findings is to discover issues and benefits within the top-down overall structure of how policy is implemented and created and not the individual nations' issues. Recurring issues demonstrate a structural matter that needs to be addressed and isolates the policy itself. This aspect of the research conducted was intended to answer the first two research questions relating to implementation. The latter two will be answered by the observational study and the linkages between the previous implementation processes and the current coordination processes.

4.2 First Research Question Answer

When attempting to understand the complex process of international policy from creation to administration, the first questions need to analyze the previous implementation process. The first research question was; *what aspects of previous implementations of LDN and VGGT have been considered successful?* This was answered through the literature review column on the VGGT and LDN policy aspects that benefited their application to different nations. Findings on the benefits were important, as while it was clear there needs to be a restructuring of the current process, certain aspects and relationships between the UN and nations should be maintained. The largest strength of these policies was also one of their weaknesses; the soft law structure. The UN produces soft law, which is paradoxical as it is a non-binding commitment (Dupuy, 1999). However, this structure allows for Parties to agree to an end goal of creating and recognizing better tenure systems and reducing land degradation, without the stifling nature of international hard law.

The VGGT and LDN benefit from this soft law structure as it is easier to convince nations to agree to the policy, and allows them to not commit to aspects that are not feasible in their nation.

This affects implementation as then the policy is better able to mould to the regional context and change itself, rather than forcing the nation to change and causing more disputes. In addition to this, the implementation of these policies was benefited by the ability to customize actions and the information they provided on how previous agreements, similar to these ones, were successful. Opposingly, soft law is only truly impactful when tied to either pre-existing hard law in the nation *or* using a system of incentivization to get countries to actively follow through with these voluntary commitments. The previous implementation of the VGGT and LDN was successful when countries were already incentivized to integrate the initiative in a long-term manner (Beckh et al., 2015). The harsh reality is that unless nations and regions have something to gain, or face consequences for not committing to international policy, there is no legitimate accountability structure to force them to act. Previous literature on LDN in Nigeria explains that lack of political will creates a challenging environment to implement, but when counteracted with incentives it becomes more feasible (Ifejika Speranza et al., 2019). However, this is only one aspect of many to be considered when operationalizing a new policy in an area.

4.3 Second Research Question Answer

In the results there were multiple trends, however, there were four key findings that connected policy and implementation and aided in explaining the current issues in the top-down process. These were the lack of monitoring mechanisms, the need for cohesion between existing multilateral frameworks and stakeholders, specification of solutions for Parties, and financing and incentivization. These four main trends extrapolated from the results answer the second research question; *what were the shortcomings of previous LDN and VGGT policy integration?* In the literature review results, it was discussed how the policy itself is what drives a successful implementation, and if there is not a strong long-term structure then integration becomes challenging and more pressure is placed on nations. The largest recurring shortcoming of the previous LDN and VGGT was the lack of an explicit monitoring system on all levels of implementation. Critics explain how without knowing who is monitoring what for each aspect of the policy, whether that be the day-to-day structure, the indicators of success, or the accountability of Parties, long-term implementation sits on an unstable foundation. Case studies,

such as Wunder's research in Germany demonstrate the importance of providing context-specific indicators of improvement when attempting to achieve LDN (Wunder & Bodle, 2018).

International policy attempts to solve complex intersectional issues by providing encompassing solutions that have choice systems built-in for nations to choose the best solution for the context-specific situation. However, "simple solutions do not exist for complex ecologies" (Jansen, 2020). Providing simplified solutions that can be applied to vastly different situations not only becomes increasingly complicated in creation but places a lot of work on nations during the implementation process. Parties thus have to select which solution best works for them, which in theory is advantageous, but in practice becomes complicated and requires more resources. This paired with a lack of specified monitoring systems creates more effort required to implement and as such hinders the overall process.

There are numerous multilateral environmental frameworks with a lot of stakeholder involvement that have overlapping goals and pathways. However, the lack of synergy between existing frameworks and policies being implemented creates unnecessary complications and an overwhelming amount of resources. When attempting to implement a new initiative there is a consideration for previous actions a country has taken, but every nation is different and the information provided is not always applicable to their situation. This finding in the literature review is supported by previous literature on the importance of operational cohesion between national frameworks and international policies. For instance, the process of implementing LDN in the Lake Victoria Water Catchment in Kenya requires the integration of numerous goals and pre-existing frameworks relating to climate change and land degradation (Gichenje & Godinho, 2019).

Moreover, the soft law policy created by the UN is very top-down in nature and attempts to counteract this by working with regional and local stakeholders. While this is an important step, previous LDN and VGGT left some confusion on which stakeholders should be involved where, which created complications in stakeholder involvement during the enactment of the initiatives. This finding in the literature review is supported by previous literature explaining how the

VGGT did not provide guidance on what stakeholder partnerships should look like, operate, or how they should be monitored (Jansen & Kalas, 2020).

As well, multi-stakeholder platforms still have the ability for top-down management if they are larger organizations that do not necessarily have a deep understanding of the local context. This paired with the lack of a robust monitoring framework creates an environment that is not suitable for long-term implementation success. Previous literature, such as the case study on the German application of LDN, demonstrates how existing legal frameworks can affect implementation and result in significant shortcomings (Wunder & Bodle, 2018). Without proper existing legal frameworks in nations relating to the VGGT and LDN, implementation becomes even more challenging. Comparatively, Kenya contains a strong legal framework to address LDN, which aids in the implementation process, especially when combined with existing environmental goals (Gichenje et al., 2019.)

Previously the LDN and VGGT policies, while providing important information on how to achieve land degradation neutrality and suitable tenure systems, did have more ambiguous guidelines that created complications. These flexible guidelines are essential in international policy that works with a diverse set of nations, especially when ensuring the decision-making power remains in the hands of the Parties. Although, these ambiguous guidelines could be avoided if nations were given more specified solutions and not generalized actions with a set of specified pathways for them to select. Finally, a large shortcoming of the previous LDN and VGGT policies was unsurprising as financing and incentivization are common themes in many initiatives. In truth, convincing nations to allocate monetary resources to policy without incentivization is a challenge. Many environmental policies do require short-term costs for long-term benefits but providing an incentive to Parties aids in a successful application (Faulkner et al., 2005).

4.4 Third Research Question Answer

The third research question was answered through the observational findings in understanding *how two policies, on separate topics, are combined and transformed to match all Parties' needs.*

The policy coordination process is incredibly complicated as creating these documents involves considering numerous dynamics and different involved groups, and being constantly vigilant on how information is presented. For an organization that is relatively top-down in nature on policies that are implemented, the process of creation is very collaborative. For instance, as this COP is focusing on land degradation and land tenure, both UNCCD and FAO are heavily involved in the drafting of official documents, collection of feedback, and presentation of information. The process is not limited to those within the UN agencies and conventions but includes national focal points and CSOs, which is to be expected as the Secretariat is there to support the decisions of the Parties. However, as there are so many groups involved in the process this collaboration does become challenging when there is not a clear delineation of tasks creating an overlap. There is coordination between both the convention and the agency, as well as with other sectors of UNCCD related to sub-topics that are integrated into the official documents. As this issue is intersectional, the solution provided is similar in nature and has numerous sub-groups working on ensuring every aspect is considered.

In my observational results, I discussed the recurring issue of unnecessary bureaucracy within the current policy process of the UNCCD and FAO structure. While it is important to have a collaborative process where all perspectives are heard, at times the process appeared to be lengthy in decision-making, even though all those present appeared to agree from the beginning. I believe this could be caused by many reasons, but the main being that the UN places emphasis on education on the topics being discussed and a clear justification of their decisions made. Small aspects that caused a barrier in the ability to create fast decisions also occurred in the coordination between FAO and UNCCD. Decisions and changes to documents had to be collaborative and suggestions needed to be cleared by both groups in order to be finalized. Part of the process of coordinating the combination of the two policies is managing the external perspectives and comments received on the documents. This outside stakeholder involvement and essential conversations with nations do complicate timelines, as further work cannot be completed until feedback is received. While this system is justified as it provides a clear accountability mechanism for the Secretariat and important communication, it could be changed. For instance, if documents were more tailored for individual nations or regional groups instead of broadly encompassing, feedback could be better integrated and less contradictory. A large part

of the process is incorporating information received from the continuing requests of groups that will be using this document. However, it is challenging to include all comments when some are opposing in nature. A highly economically developed nation that relies heavily on primary resources for its economy will not have the same comments as a low economically developed nation that primarily has smallholder farmers. Different situations require different solutions and these documents do provide them, but it becomes more work for nations to translate the information into tangible actions for their context.

This begins to answer the second half of the third question on *how* this is matching all Parties' needs. Much of the work completed is a combination of reactionary and planned actions based on a mix of research and information received when creating documents. In order to match *all* Parties' needs, presented documents are required to be multifaceted and holistic in providing numerous prongs for plans of action. For instance, understanding the issues surrounding land degradation and land tenure as a whole and how these are connected. By providing widely applicable solutions that are easily integrated into existing frameworks, UNCCD and FAO are able to ensure there is the inclusion of critical aspects required in solutions. Furthermore, in order to ensure all Parties' needs are met there is continuous communication with focal points on their thoughts and concerns. International policy requires a very dynamic and collaborative setting in order to create the most suitable solution for an issue. As such, the structure is looser when it reaches these higher levels of policy creation. There is not a specific structure to follow, but there is a continuous connection back to the previous COP's mandate. The end goal acts as the root of the solution allowing for guidance during a complex process with numerous shifting aspects.

4.5 Fourth Research Question Answer

Linkages between the literature review and observational findings were analyzed in order to best answer the final research question, *how does the UN's perception of the success of their work impact the effectiveness of the policy produced?* From my observations, it appeared as though much of the UN's perception of their work comes from a combination of stakeholders and Parties working with the policy and not academic literature critiquing the process. Interestingly, it appears as though academic resources and literature are not utilized within the UN process, as

it more focuses on previous policy and outcome reports of their work. While this is understandable as much of their work is reactionary and has to assess what has been successful in practice, it does appear as though they are missing a critical perspective. The UN does have some consultants that are from academic backgrounds that are able to provide this perspective, but it is not the extent of using academic literature that critiques their policy. Thus, the UN's perception of their work's success may be inaccurate if not all perspectives are included. As previously stated, the UN historically functions in a top-down manner and while there are attempts to be inclusive in decision-making processes, barriers to inclusion still exist.

International policy is incredibly complex to structure successfully as each policy, each country, and each issue function differently and have a different idea of "successful". However, for the sake of answering this question, success will be seen as a positive long-term impact that creates beneficial change in the targeted issue. For this case, it will be land degradation and land tenure. When addressing the linkages between the literature review findings and the observational findings it is challenging to draw any finite conclusions, but inferences can be made on how the two processes affect one another. For instance, implementation continuously experienced issues with the delineation of tasks and stakeholder involvement, as the amount of information provided was both overwhelming and ambiguous. The start of this issue could be seen in the structure of policy that provides solutions for every situation in one location. Having all the information available for each country to use is beneficial, however, it is also complicated as it requires more work on countries to filter through suggestions that are not pertinent to their situation. The policy itself is what allows for successful implementation, and a complicated policy creates a complicated integration process. When working with nations that are attempting to solve numerous interconnected issues, the less work that is required on their end, the more likely coordination and implementation will occur with ease.

While previous UN work has been successful in the creation of new guidelines and has made strides in environmental and human protection, there is a lack of synergy between bodies and their work. The success of a policy is not solely based on the initial impact it has, but on the long-term effect and ability to work cohesively with existing multilateral frameworks. If the UN's perception of success blinds them from the critiques of their work, then the effectiveness of

the policy produced will decrease, especially if similar mistakes are occurring. I saw a glimpse into this mentality during my observations with the choice to solely use positive case studies and to not use failed examples in order to learn from previous mistakes. It was understandable to not alienate certain regions, however, there is a way to diplomatically explain issues and provide alternative solutions instead of ignoring key learning experiences. An effective policy *has* to provide a holistic perspective that includes downfalls and mistakes that may occur but also has to recognize that each region will have different issues and end goals. As such, the current process does require a mentality change. This frame of mind was present in my observations when the justification to use certain terminology was solely because it had been used in a previous policy. Meaning that cohesion between existing measures can be reached as the resources to do so are there. However, it can become too complicated for individual nations to achieve when also considering national and regional frameworks.

Having an end goal that is quite lofty, yet having outcomes not always be successful is a trend in UN policies. It was recently discussed how the SDGs will most likely not be met by 2030 and one of the main constraints is that they are not taken seriously by countries. This along with the uncoordinated requests by numerous international organizations all attempting to achieve the same end goal creates an overwhelming environment (Hub, 2020). This repeated mistake is an example of the UN's perception of their work not necessarily aligning with the impact it truly has. Large goals with too many instructions and not enough technical information is an issue currently seen. This is reflected in the literature review results discussing critiques of policy and requesting more explicit monitoring frameworks and guidelines on both daily activities and delineation of tasks. I observed this issue within the coordination processes as well; when a topic is intersectional it becomes challenging to draw boundaries on who and what to include.

The final result to consider in answering this question is the nature of soft law without incentivization and the functionality of it with the current process. The UN can only enforce voluntary international agreements and Parties are more likely to agree if there is incentivization (Dunlop & Corbera, 2016). Incentivization processes should be more specified for nations' desires in order to individually market the benefits of participatory engagement in this multilateral agreement. However, the UN policies could be more effective if there was a

recognition of the need for change. By recognizing the success and failures of previous implementation and policy coordination tactics, the UN would be able to create more effective initiatives and adapt to the current global desires.

4.6 Literature Limitations

This literature review did have limitations pertaining to the keywords selected, as it may not have included all relevant studies. As well, not all studies analyzed the VGGT and LDN policies within the same perspective, presenting a bias. However, this was counteracted by tracking the main trends found within the results of the articles. Another limitation was the number of studies used and the collection of literature from only two databases and the information having to be published after 2015. The time restriction limited the information that was able to be collected, but this was necessary to only include literature addressing both policies after they had been more well established.

4.7 Observational Study Limitations

The observational study did contain limitations and a bias to the information collected. For instance, all observations are from my point of view as an Intern with UNCCD, which inherently limits the amount of information presented. This limitation affects the amount of information I would be able to collect. As well, the observations did contain my personal critiques and questions which inherently introduces my bias into the findings. However, all critiques and questions can be grounded in structural observations which provide justification. Beyond this, the categorization of data may have limited the information that was presented and the need to follow Chatham House Rules did create some ambiguity for readers to understand results.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

5.1 Key Findings for Future Policy

After unpacking all the findings and applying them to the research questions, the general conclusion is that there is a recognized need for change. This change would be both structural to how the UN coordinates and creates policy, but also how policy is formatted to implement into a nation. There were many critiques on previous implementation issues that could be mitigated by a policy that accounts for long-term implementation and has more explicit guidelines. However, with the current structure of generalized policy for LDN and the VGGT, this becomes challenging. Guidelines need to be explicit and have all the information on how to implement and monitor progress and how to collaborate with existing stakeholders and frameworks. Simultaneously they need to not contain overwhelming amounts of information. The only feasible way to achieve this and have it be an effective format is to halt the trend of generalized policies and create specified solutions for nations immediately after the mandate is passed. Current solutions provide specified information for a variety of situations *and* general aspects that all nations, regardless of the situation, should use. This information is important for all nations to have access to, however, it becomes challenging to coordinate usage and creates disputes in decision-making processes.

Beyond the restructuring of current UNCCD and FAO coordination and implementation frameworks, findings discovered there need to be more perspectives included when assessing old practices. Perception of success will affect how impactful future policy will be; if key shortcomings are not recognized or justified and not addressed, they will continue to occur. Alternatively, the success of the previous procedure should be highlighted and analyzed for *why* it was successful and what aspects can be more universally applicable and which are context-dependent. Implementing policy is a continuation of the policy creation as many of the same actors are still involved in the process. As such, issues in coordination can translate to gaps and complications when integrating the policy.

While the findings were based on the processes of UNCCD and the FAO, they can be translated to other areas of international policy and other multilateral agreements. Many of these top-down structures have a high level of complexity in organizing numerous stakeholders, end goals, and opposing opinions. While problems can be international, solutions are needed to be local. Globally, land degradation is experienced and land tenure is a complicated environmental and social issue. However, not all experiences are the same and as such require different information. This is known by the UN which is why they provide different pathways for countries to select what is most applicable to their situation. However, the more work required on the behalf of Parties, the less likely the action will be taken. By providing individualized solutions for nations and integrating their focal points and key stakeholders into the process, there is less of a chance that solutions will experience a lack of cohesion with regional context. This should then create more effective policy, reduce bureaucracy, and create a more beneficial impact.

5.2 Suggestions for Restructuring

While this may not be applicable to all international organizations creating multilateral environmental frameworks, this is a proposed restructuring based on previous conclusions. The restructuring focuses on the individualization of solutions to global issues to ease implementation. The current process does have certain benefits which are why there is a *restructuring* and not an *upheaval* of the framework. Reallocating resources during the coordination phase should then not require extra work and support. Currently, UNCCD and FAO have wide amounts of resources and intelligent, highly educated individuals. As well, nations have national focal points, regional liaison officers (RLOs) and their own knowledge and resources on their experience with land degradation and land tenure. This research has shown that generalized solutions with overwhelming amounts of information in which Parties have to select best practices are overly complicated. What should occur is national or regional focal points working directly with members of the Secretariat to create their customized solutions.

By having national focal points be deeply involved in the creation of their own policy they should be able to circumvent the issues of moulding existing structures within their country during the implementation. Currently, resources are placed into the creation of large documents

and solutions, but if this was divided between experts both within and outside the UN, generalized solutions should not be required. The current process involves many individuals working towards the same goal with a lot of collaboration to come to decisions. However, what if instead of all working on the same document each group worked on separate documents achieving the same goal in different regions? This new structure can be seen in Figure 3. *Policy Restructuring Format with Sub-regions and Regions Identified*. The United Nations has divided the world into sub-regions for their statistical analysis and is able to group countries from similar regions. This is called the Geoscheme (UNStats, 1999). While this does not mean they experience the same socioeconomic and political situation, it is a beneficial way to work with nations. Especially when addressing environmental agreements as areas with similar climates and environmental resources require similar assessment. The UN Geoscheme is divided between five regions and nineteen sub-regions of nations (UNStats, 1999). As well, the UN contains numerous liaison positions beyond the RLOs. There are positions to act as the communication between UN work and civil society organizations (CSOs), and multiple connections to external stakeholders involved in local, regional, national and international levels of policy.

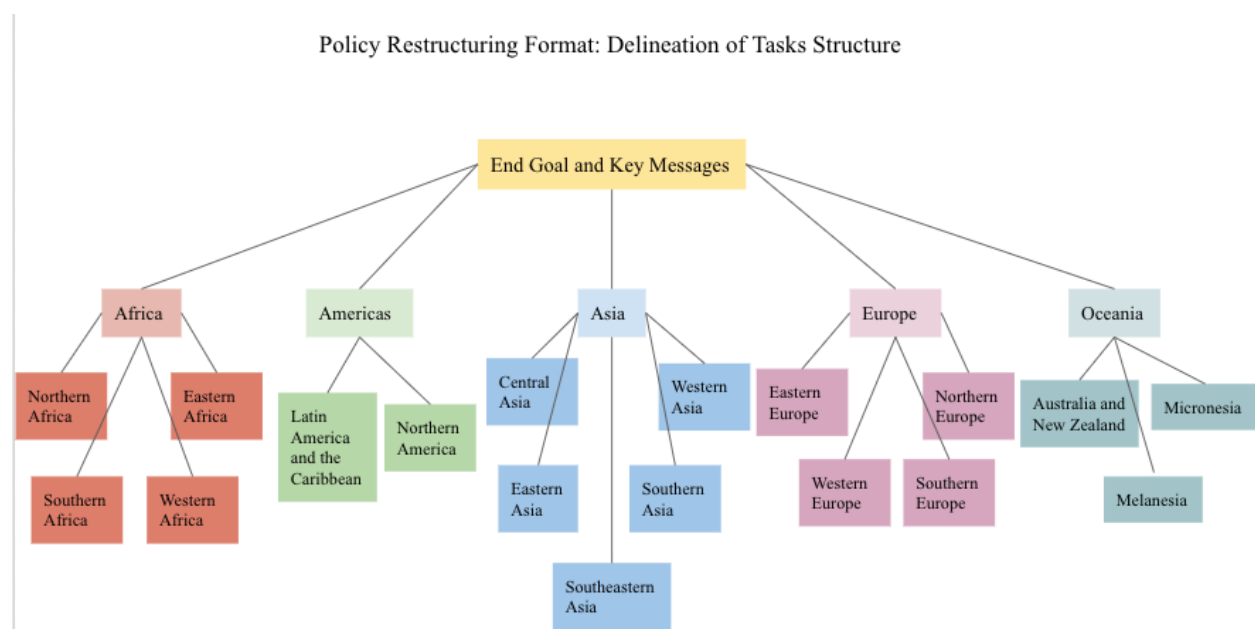


Figure 3. *Policy Restructuring Format with Sub-Regions and Regions Identified* (Source: Author)

As seen in Figure 3, the nineteen sub-regions are under each of the five regions. A policy created for one sub-region, while still accounting for the variety found in the area, should more likely be

applicable to their context rather than one created for all nineteen. As well, experts on topics are needed to create the policy and it should be more likely to find groups and individuals that are an expert on Western Africa, as an example, than you are to find someone who understands the intricacies of every sub-region. Not only should this reformatting create a more applicable policy, but it would be a policy based on a deep understanding of the region's environment, socioeconomic stance, and political and cultural conditions. Topics as complex and intersectional as land usage and tenure are able to have a variety of issues all rooted in different reasoning. It would be unrealistic to believe the top-down nature of current UN policy processes would be changed easily. This is why this format still utilizes a similar hierarchical framework in the delineation of tasks. Each one of the nineteen policies must attempt to achieve the same end goal and incorporate key messages, in order to maintain cohesion between separate policies. The first step should be ensuring the UN Secretariat is able to distil the key goals and messages from the Parties' previous mandate. After these are explicitly stated and agreed upon, the process of regional consulting can occur. This will begin the introduction of what the policy is attempting to achieve, as well as maintain relationships and allies for the next COP; a key aspect of international policy. This is the foundational groundwork that is necessary before sub-regional policy work can begin.

Once critical information has been decided, sub-regional policy work can begin. The actors that are necessary to be involved are the liaisons for both the RLOs, present CSOs in the sub-region, and a national focal point. As well, experts on land tenure and degradation and UN personnel involved in policy creation should be required. Beyond this, incorporating local stakeholders as consultants and academics should help both broaden the perspective within the policy and reduce gaps. This should also increase local involvement and counteract the top-down critiques of previous UN processes. This group should be able to provide perspective on the majority of critical aspects for the region. Understanding what works well for the area and what type of land is present at the beginning allows the policy to be tailored and not moulded *during* implementation.

This structure should be able to solve previous issues found in implementation critiques from the literature review. The sub-regional policy should be able to formulate explicit monitoring

systems that are applicable to the stakeholders in that area and know who is involved in all levels of implementation. The sub-regional policy should also reduce the contradictory comments received on generalized policy, as Northern America will not have the same desires as Southeastern Asia. The reasoning for including the five regions is to allow a representative of that sector of sub-regions to relay information on policy progress and ensure cohesion between goals.

While this may appear as if more resources are required than a regular large policy containing all information, it is simply a reallocation. All of the mentioned participants are already involved in policy coordination processes and continuously consult and provide perspectives. However, all perspectives are collected together creating confusion. By separating regions and thus separating participants, the UN should be able to better address the concerns of participants and not have to somehow appease everyone. This connects to the final aspect of the proposed structure; diplomacy. While diplomatic behaviour is essential in sensitive topics such as land degradation and tenure, it cannot be used as a shield to discuss challenging subject matter. For instance, not recognizing previous mistakes of nations or not disagreeing with decisions that delay progress is not diplomatic, it is complacent. Diplomatic behaviour should allow for the Secretariat to disagree and still work for the Parties. This can be through providing solutions to previous mistakes and being aware of how information is presented, but not excluding information. This is less of a structural change and more of a mentality shift that should support the new proposed framework.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

International policy coordination and implementation are incredibly complex to unpack as there is no specified structure. However, while there are benefits to how it is currently done there are unrecognized criticisms that create issues within both the combination and implementation of policy. All resources are already available to achieve a more successful form of policy that is able to reduce bureaucracy and become more applicable to nations. All that is truly required is a reallocation of resources and deeper recognition of internal structural issues that unnecessarily

hinder the effectiveness of the vital policy. Change is complex but not impossible to achieve, especially with a global perspective and local action.

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Appendix

Key Acronyms and Terminology

Agency → Autonomous organization working with the UN, FAO is a specialized agency

COP → Convention of the Parties

Convention → One of the three Rio Conventions, UNCCD is a convention

FAO → Food and Agriculture Organization

LDN → Land Degradation Neutrality

RLO → Regional Liaison Officer

SPI → Science-Policy Interface

UN → United Nations

UNCCD → United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

VGGT → Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure

Chart 1. Literature Review Findings

First Author's Last Name and Date	LDN or VGGT	Implementation and Policy Critiques	Implementation and Policy Benefits	External Factors Affecting the Process	Further Suggestions
Kramer, 2021	VGGT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the VGGT is not legally binding (it is a soft law instrument with no legal obligations) - there is an absence of robust monitoring framework at national level - no systematic monitoring leads to no coordinated implementation approaches beyond pilot approaches - only having pilot approaches limits the pool of information on successful implementation for the broader application - does not account for land conflicts to the required extent, gap in the interconnected nature of land governance - not placing a foundation of human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VGGT to have some legal significance which make lawyers take guidance seriously - guidelines draw on binding human rights commitments and rely on legitimate institutionalized human rights monitoring systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - third parties infringing on land rights due to the lack of proper legislation and jurisdiction from state actors - legal barriers, cultural barriers, political and administrative barriers, socioeconomic barriers for women and migrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monitoring / human rights based approach (HRBA), as there is no human right to land but the resources land provides are a human right would better support the legitimacy of VGGT and aid in implementation - HRBA would create obligation of stakeholders to ensure human rights are met, pressuring VGGT success - a clear normative framework and clarity on human right obligations - accountability and legitimacy framework using previous information as a foundation - make equal impact across all of society - increased accountability aids in successful implementation - provide monitoring tools that collect quantitative and qualitative data on state governance to monitor implementation - <i>highlighting their multilateralism and accountability mechanisms that are based on existing and binding commitments by states</i>
Jansen, 2020	VGGT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is not a definition of what "monitoring" is in the VGGT (which is needs to specify feedback, learning and identification of problems) - CSOs criticize states creating multi-stakeholder platforms in a top-down manner without understanding local context - stakeholder platforms used in implementation do not account for power imbalances and representation issues - there is a lack of connection with the national parliament and other democratic bodies for the legitimacy of the VGGT implementation making it hard to have soft law, public support / funding and legislation - lack of clear goals and baseline lead to challenging methodology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bottom-up processes that occasionally occurred with stakeholders was the most effect - the use of stakeholders stated is beneficial, but if they are actually used is another question - the soft law nature of VGGT allow for provisions in order to elaborate under hard law and do not create stifling implementation processes - soft law once accepted and practiced can become hard law (in theory) - using obligation, precision and delegation aid in effective implementation - recognition of both customary and informal tenure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VGGT are considered "soft law" which places barriers in enforcement both positive (nations will agree) and negative (no real consequence with lack of follow-through) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there needs to be a monitoring systems at all levels of implementation and both in the public and private strategies presented at all scales - FAO should not be the one monitoring the implementation process it should be the national/regional stakeholders - there needs to be more accountability and it is a precondition to monitoring - need to emphasize the link more between VGGT and human rights obligations - ensuring that monitoring is a precondition of accountability - simplify the monitoring system as it is currently riddled with bureaucracy (structures, processes, and outcomes and results) - integrated a temporal measurement for change in tenure (what it was before and after) and shifting relationships - results-based management approach - human rights based approach - good practices approach - when working with multi-stakeholder platforms you need a mutual accountability framework (delineation of tasks and responsibilities)

Beckh, 2015	VGGT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there needs to be further bold action - there was not a platform for exchange and discussion on how to implement and have examples of other nations experiences - not clear what needs to be monitored and by whom - needed visual aid and contexts in the document, making the information easier to understand (remove academic barriers) - needed more tools for learning (online, open source database, materials, packages, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the process for nations that are already incentivized to use VGGT have better implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understanding the lack of utilization of vital third-parties such as elites in the nation to aid in convincing the government - working with the private sector (companies) to apply the VGGT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inclusive multi-stakeholder processes are <i>the</i> important tool to properly implement and monitor - necessary to build relationships - there needs to be better incentivization for parties ie. allowing them to become champion states, approach national elites to convince decision-makers, the role of academia - translate the VGGT and make it more applicable to local context and understanding - financially support grassroot organizations and aid in the support and organization of social movements + raise expertise in local communities - create a platform for information to be shared about practices (good and bad) and tools for VGGT
van Haren, 2019	LDN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there requires better engagement with the communities and community-based initiatives - there requires more context-specific actions and capacity development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the information collected from the SLM technology was able to steer the LDN and its indicators - this was able to show what incentives work and rate at which technology is adopted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the four most hindering aspects for implementation of LDN/SLM would be financial resources, institutional settings, legal frameworks, and knowledge about SLM and access to technical support - the different types of lands (size, function, types) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - connecting to pre-existing practices of SLM and the data collected as a foundation would aid in implementation
Metternicht, 2019	LDN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information provided by UNCCD-SPI was complicated at multi-levels, governance and implementation processes - lacking quantitative data - challenging when countries with variety in landscape need to implement at the national level and high levels of variability in socioeconomic conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provided useful questions to guide national implementation processes - operationalisation of LDN is applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - where investors want to invest and where is most beneficial (not all land can be improved) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - areas with high variety in socioeconomic and biophysical need to be zoned and interactions need to be identified - set-up institutional support related to LDN - capitalize on the connections between LDN goals and market-based instruments that have been used - investment needs to be specified - bottom-up approaches integrated and the use of SLM practices (previous policy)

Allen, 2020	LDN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - targets placed forward were inadequate and the rules and guidelines were not always explicit - there was a disregard for integrative approaches and a lack of earmarked funds - lack of consideration of land tenure rights, integrated land use planning which led to challenges in implementation - there was a lack of guidance on the actual implementation process - lack of monitoring guidance and data for nations to follow, making it challenging for long-term implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the institutional enabling environment and political commitment and coordination mechanisms in place in countries was relatively established for the enabling environment - the consideration of other aspects of land makes implementation easier - national baselines on global and national indicators gave a clear starting point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of political will and leadership because of limited insight into LDN and it's cross-sectoral benefits - lack of funds and financial resources - there was a lack of high level commitment to LDN - national land use data was not always sufficient in information to aid implementing LDN - LDN was not considered a top policy priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there needs to be more evidence on elements of an enabling environment to support policy makers and implementation process - requires more awareness of LDN and understanding of concepts to be accepted more easily - more financing is required - better understanding of the variety of expectations from LDN benefits
Chasek, 2019	LDN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of awareness-raising mechanisms lead to funds being allocated to LDN initiatives - lack of knowledge on how to integrate LDN into land use planning - no incentivization and pathways to involve local officials, decision makers, land users and other stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the interconnected nature of the LDN policy and the SPI framework provided for further information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of recognition of synergies between multilateral environmental agreements creates issues in implementation - poor coordination between government and local, lack of knowledge and systems for monitoring and evaluating LDN - inadequate land use planning measures, poor interaction between land use planning and UNCCD NAPs, lack of resources to integrate LDN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there needs to be procedures for day-to-day operations - funds needs to be pre-allocated - strong implementation tools are methods are needed to switch to day-to-day operations - monitor anticipated losses and gains, analyse interplay between used and unused lands, counterbalance the anticipated losses by planning additional gains - need to better coordinate the 3 Rio Conventions and provide synergies and incentives between the 3 convention goals - should combine funding from multiple sources related to all 3 conventions - need to have LDN initiatives take into account the national peculiarities to have successful implementation
Cowie 2018	LDN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - too many of the models provided and information given to parties has to be adjusted to match their situation and relies on the use of proper authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the current framework provides monitoring strategies and interpretation of results - countries can customize their own framework to their own system - the baseline is set per country meaning the improvement is context-dependent - provide frameworks and visuals for users to implement if time and effort is placed into achieving LDN 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - progress towards LDN should be monitored through process indicators that record action - providing more opportunities for capacity building and education - interim monitoring allows for implementation processes to be shifted to match situations

Akhtar-Schuster, 2017	LDN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is not a human-centred structure to LDN in which is needed, it is only on the scientific definition of LDN - terminology of the LDN is ambiguous and causes issues in understanding different scales and effects - not a distinct enough difference between degraded land and land that is degrading and how to handle these differently - financing and resourcing in the pilot project were not sufficient and require a clear and sustainable funding source 	- catalyzes achievement of SDGs related to LDN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - too many of the models provided and information given to parties has to be adjusted to match their situation and relies on the use of proper authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - should work more closely with CBD in order to better manage all aspects of climate issues aiding in implementation - needs to consider ecological, social, cultural, and economic realities at local, national, and regional levels - putting human ideals at the centre - guidelines need to be clearer on the desired goal of rehabilitation or restoration, as they require different stakeholders - benefits need to be explicit and incentives need to be enticing - reinforcing preventative SLM is key in LDN implementation - require a comprehensive technical guide to support LDN implementation - UNFCCC and SLM measures need to be integrated into LDN (multilateral environmental agreements need to be cohesive in action) - combine actions of all 3 Rio Conventions
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Chart 2. Observational Findings

Date (day/month/year)	Type of Observations	Observation Notes
06/10/2021	Stucture of policy coordination process	- decisions cannot be unilaterally made, coordination becomes complicated when both FAO and UNCCD are following similar but different timelines and other aspects interfere with coordination
	Internal interactions	- during internal meetings there is more honesty in the thoughts surrounding processes and documents, ie. if there is too much jargon used and issues in the document, but this is presented differently to other groups
	Personal critiques and questions	- diplomacy seems to be used as a barrier to disagree with each other, continued by the veiled thoughts as no one ones to offend other portfolios
21/10/2021	Stucture of policy coordination process	- internal crossovers: many clarifications and justifications of actions seems to create unnecessary bureaucracy - plans seem to be made during meeting as a group instead of outside and brought to the group - continuous check-in with Parties to ensure coherence in goals and agreeing on ground level
	Internal interactions	- a lengthy discussion instead of a conversation of the current plan - once formalities are lessened it becomes easier to get work completed - lots of discussion on how to present information, questions, and issues without presenting as contentious
	Personal critiques and questions	- should be a clear delineation of tasks - be able to disagree without worry of offending other portfolios
22/10/2021	Stucture of policy coordination process	- wording is essential in the official documents ("and" vs. "or" can change a Parties' decision)
	Internal interactions	- external work is necessary (not all completed through internal UN processes) - discussions between sectors is essential as my sector is only one of multiple areas worked on in COP- external work is necessary (not all completed through internal UN processes) - discussions between sectors is essential as my sector is only one of multiple areas worked on in COP
	Personal critiques and questions	- awareness-raising should occur before, during, and after the COP - the continuous back and forth of wording with a level of diplomacy that does not allow for disagreeing appears to create more issues than success - bureaucratic at times for discussions between groups
27/10/2021	Stucture of policy coordination process	- ensuring attendees of COP are educated about the topic <i>before</i> the COP to have their support for the policy presented - have to triple check all wording on documents as different nations will refute different phrasing and words - words have to be easily translated
	Internal interactions	- understanding the barrier of translations and ability for groups to participate in webinars and calls - a lot of "ping-ponging" back and forth on slight adjustments in documents between UNCCD and FAO
	Personal critiques and questions	- educational practices are good, but information should be made more accessible to all instead of only a select few - the communication between FAO and UNCCD became overly complicated in delineation of tasks

05/11/2021	Stucture of policy coordination process	- one sector spearheads, but multiple groups involved in participation
	Internal interactions	- logistical mistakes, such as any company can be made, and the more challenging it is for stakeholders to participate in policy creation, the less likely they are to participate: have to be very clear on where they send information and feedback on documents (ie. email has to remain constant) - the above point is similar to implementation processes
	Personal critiques and questions	- things are a balance between being informative/real and also diplomatic and vague enough as to not alienate anyone - allow Parties to be vague about what they are agreeing to do
10/11/2021	Stucture of policy coordination process	- less organized, cannot follow a specified structure as it is half planned and half reactionary
	Internal interactions	- internal meetings is a large discussion-based decision-making process
17/11/2021	Stucture of policy coordination process	- logistics on webinars and ensuring the information is presented in a digestible manner - timeline appears to be shifting (partly due to covid and the extra allocated time) and dependent on multiple groups beyond internal
02/12/2021	Internal interactions	- while it is important to gain contributions from all those present at webinars it appears as though it is more to gain alliances in preparation for the COP - some feedback is not as valuable with lack of knowledge on the subject and as such the process appears to add more bureaucracy than benefit to the policy creation - the use of only positive examples surrounding land tenure and land degradation practices creates issues as Parties do not understand what to avoid
	Personal critiques and questions	- while it is important to gain contributions from all those present at webinars it appears as though it is more to gain alliances in preparation for the COP - some feedback is not as valuable with lack of knowledge on the subject and as such the process appears to add more bureaucracy than benefit to the policy creation - the use of only positive examples surrounding land tenure and land degradation practices creates issues as Parties do not understand what to <i>avoid</i> - is there a way to diplomatically display mistakes?
	Stucture of policy coordination process	- feedback received was beneficial in official document creation - aided in seeing external groups perspectives - feedback is information to be able to use in the negotiation rooms during the COP and link groups comments back and create an ally - this webinar occurred because of the previous COP request
	Internal interactions	- information must be accessible to all attending (language and information barriers) - visuals are essential, always account for the person with the lowest amount of knowledge - always conducted in manner with what Parties request - numerous moving factors and groups involved in preparation for COP to account for

08/12/2021	Personal critiques and questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the webinars are for the attendees more than they are for the creation of the official document it appears - there always an ulterior motive (not in a negative manner) to create connections and prepare for the COP, the more people aware of a document and see their contributions will sign on - if there is access to Parties and groups before COP, should they not be better utilized? For instance, to help create individual solutions?
12/01/2022	Stucture of policy coordination process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - changes to documents made obvious so they can be changed again between FAO and UNCCD - not all requests to change documents is feasible - need a consideration of enough attention given to each region of the world in the document
	Internal interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discussion surrounding the continuous contradicting requests and feedback received by groups - each person involved has a different background and amount of time involved with UN processes
	Personal critiques and questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - working with a diverse set of nations and backgrounds, feedback will always be contradicting especially on a "one size fits all" document - case studies should not always be positive examples, though it is understandable why they are used
18/01/2022	Personal critiques and questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - why are so many resources placed into a document when there is already a discussion on how Parties may not read it? - why not create nation-specific solutions by reallocating resources and creating a more integrated process with national and regional focal points? - at times with the lack of clear delineation of tasks it creates unnecessary bureaucracy - should UNCCD and FAO not make generalized solutions more of a foundation and place resources on regional-specific initiatives? - working with nations would reduce the infringement on national sovereignty
27/01/2022	Stucture of policy coordination process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contributions from Parties <i>have</i> to be included in order to get them to work with the policy as they already technically have - meetings continuously connect back to what the Parties request as that is the sole purpose of the Secretariat - the structure is unstructured in nature as it is working towards an end goal but not following a specific pathway - incredibly complicated as you need to account for Parties and other UN organizations, donors and other stakeholders
	Internal interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sometimes information becomes too overwhelming in what needs to be understood and used - synthesizing information and understanding who is most qualified to complete certain tasks - information is always connected back to the document worked on and end goal
	Personal critiques and questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do we get too stuck on the meaning of words? or is this a necessary part of the process? is there a happy median? - would it reduce complications if at the beginning of this process (ie. right after the COP) there is a "mother-plan" created on a timeline that is shared with everyone and creates key dates that aspects need to be completed by - the first few weeks should be allocated to solely planning - do exit reports exist on what has been previously most effective when working with Parties?

01/02/2022	Stucture of policy coordination process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - challenging to draw the line on where to concede on issues (ie. gender and female empowerment should be integrated, but cannot be the entire document as it is focusing on land degradation and tenure) - as a group has to come to a decision, not everyone will always agree
	Internal interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - placement of key messages and certain aspects are crucial in official documents for Parties' understanding, structure is essential - discussion on the importance of words allowing for the ability to synergise previous UNCCD and FAO documents - different words call for different actions - discussion on connecting aspects to the root of the document and understanding what does and does not fit
	Personal critiques and questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - while it is understandable that certain "progressive" aspects cannot be included in documents because it creates alienation of certain nations and more arguments that are not related to land tenure and degradation, it does also feel like a missed opportunity to discuss important issues such as gender - some actions can feel more performative than impactful if the policy is only a vessel to get Parties to agree to take first steps instead of large actions to solve dire issues - some logic of doing something because a previous policy did appears to be hindering development of policy actions