



# ELD Strategy 2023 – 2030: Transformative action for land





## Imprint

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# ELD's case for action

The UNCCD Global Land Outlook 2022 states, “Land resources – soil, water, and biodiversity – provide the foundation for the wealth of our societies and economies. They meet the growing needs and desires for food, water, fuel, and other raw materials that shape our livelihoods and lifestyles” (UNCCD 2022a). In addition, they provide a range of much overlooked but vital regulating and cultural ecosystem services.

The ecological foundation for the wealth of our societies and economies is dramatically at risk.

Up to 40% of the world's land area is already degraded, affecting nearly half of the world's population. Each of the land resources is under severe pressure: 24 billion tons of fertile soil are lost every year (GEF 2019), biodiversity is in steep decline and 2.3 billion people face water stress already today, with droughts projected to be more frequent, severe, and longer lasting in the future (UNCCD 2022b). Three quarters of the Earth's land surface, along with the terrestrial ecosystems it hosts, have already been significantly altered by humans (IPBES 2018). Land degradation furthermore causes the release of soil carbon and loss of habitats, making it one of the most important contributors to climate change and biodiversity loss. As a result, the world has transgressed its planetary boundaries (Richardson et al. 2023).

The enormous costs of land degradation are well established: Already in 2015, the ELD Initiative estimated that \$ 6.3–10.6 trillion worth of ecosystem services are lost every year – equivalent to 10–17% of global GDP. Even the lower estimate is more than five times the entire value of agriculture in the market economy (ELD 2015). Such calculations of true costs and values are regularly not taken into account in land use decisions.



### The values of land

With its landmark report “The Value of Land” (ELD 2015), the ELD Initiative raised global awareness on the costs of land degradation and benefits of sustainable land management. As a pioneering assessment and collaboration of leading scientists and experts, the report introduced and coined the term “the value of land”. It is well established today that multiple perspectives and dimensions of “value” need to be recognized. These can be expressed, among others, in biophysical, socio-cultural, socio-economic, or monetary terms (IPBES 2022). The ELD Initiative therefore refines the term to “the values of land” and defines it as the multitude of the values of the ecosystem services that land-based natural capital – soil, water, and biodiversity – provides.

To drive change, it is not sufficient to solely uncover the values of land, we also need to make it count in decisions and create an enabling environment with policy reforms, economic instruments, institutional design, and financing strategies. Assessing the values of land is an important building block for each of these aspects.

ELD analysis at the same time finds that there is a significant financing gap for terrestrial and marine nature-based solutions. The State of Finance for Nature report 2023 estimates that to meet the Rio Convention targets on limiting climate change to 1.5° C, as well as the Global Biodiversity Framework target to set aside 30 per cent of land and sea by 2030 and achieve land degradation neutrality, finance flows to nature-based solutions must almost triple from current levels (\$200 billion) to reach \$542 billion per year by 2030 and quadruple to \$737 billion by 2050. This financing gap stands in opposition to \$7 trillion that is invested globally each year in activities that have a direct negative impact on nature from both public and private sector sources – equivalent to roughly 7 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (UNEP, Global Canopy, ELD 2023).

Due to the scale of the issue and the urgency to act, the world is in need for a system change to sustainable land and water management and the restoration of already degraded land and ecosystems. Business as usual is not an option and incremental changes will not be sufficient. What is needed now is a holistic and integrated view on the land-water-climate-biodiversity nexus, and land solutions that contribute to inflicting the required transformative change to put us on a different path on how we manage our land and ecosystems.



This is also at the heart of the transformation that the 2030 Agenda envisages, since land use is the common denominator between many of the sustainable development goals as well as of the three Rio Conventions: UNCCD, UNFCCC, and UNCBD.



### Land solutions for transformative change

Transformative change refers to the deep rooted and encompassing change of societies and economies that is needed to ensure development and prosperity within planetary boundaries. No single intervention will bring about transformative change, but a set of leverage points can help create necessary conditions (IPBES 2022). The ELD Initiative identifies three categories of land solutions that serve as leverage points in the land-water-climate-biodiversity nexus:

- i. Sustainable land management and restoration practices,**
- ii. Policy instruments and institutional design, and**
- iii. Financing solutions and strategies.**

Assessing the values of land with integrated and forward-looking assessments is a means to informing the use of these solutions in policy and decision-making and to ultimately drive the transformative change that is needed to preserve our land and its ecosystems.

The good news is:  
Conserving and restoring land and  
its terrestrial ecosystems pays off.

Evidence shows that every dollar invested in restoring degraded land results in a return of 7–30 \$ in economic benefits (UNCCD 2022). And awareness-raising efforts in recent years have led to a widespread recognition from governments, business, and civil-society of the diverse economic, environmental, and social values of land.

# Achievements since 2011

Established in 2011 between the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the European Commission and hosted by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the ELD Initiative has been making the economic case for sustainable land management around the world. For over a decade, the ELD Initiative has raised awareness on the value of land across audiences and communities, among decision-makers, practitioners, researchers, NGOs, and others, informed policy processes and built capacities.

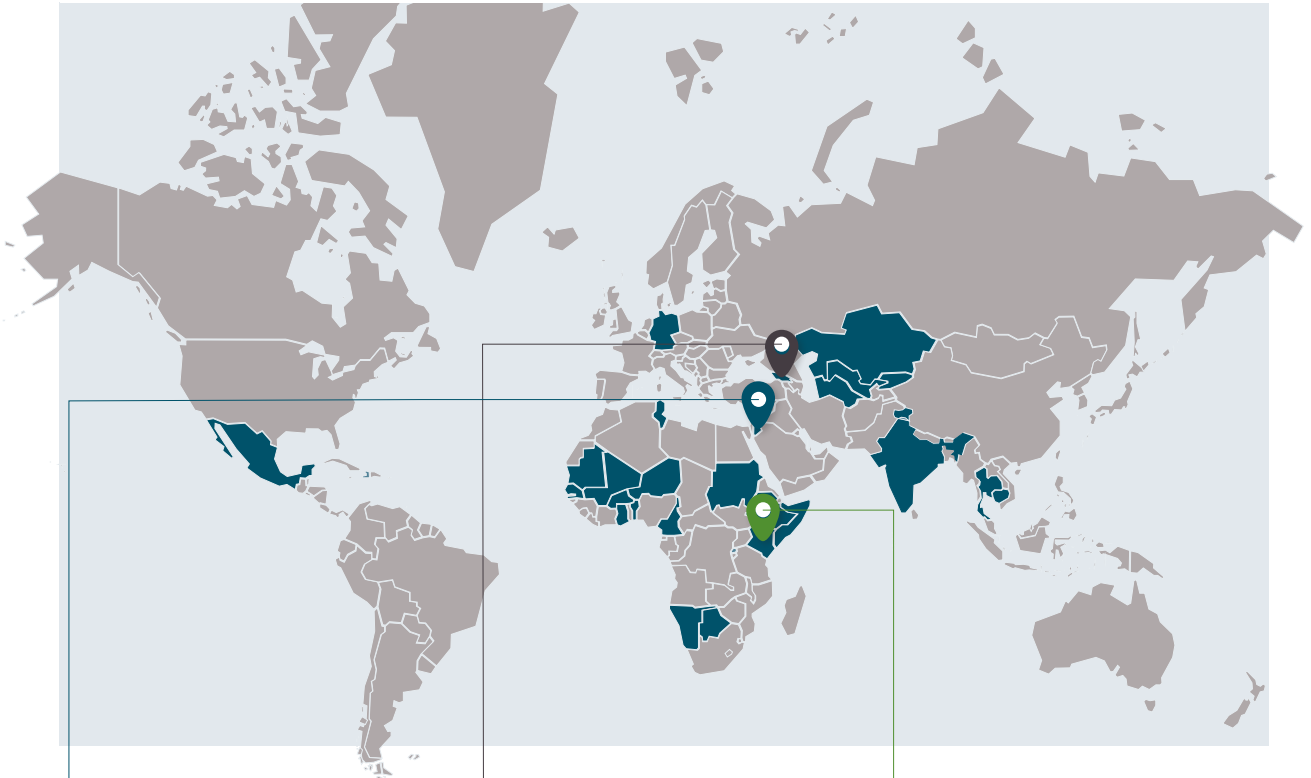
**FIGURE 1** ELD achievements as of February 2024



Since 2011, the ELD Initiative has supported governments around the world to take better land decisions that are informed by rigorous science and economic analysis and data.



**FIGURE 2** ELD promoting sustainable land management around the world. Exemplary impact stories:



**Jordan:**

ELD's assessment prompted the replication of the traditional Al-Hima rangeland management model in southern Jordan leading to the restoration of 120,000 ha of land, informed Jordan's National Rangeland Strategy, led to the initiation of a Payment for Ecosystem Services scheme and saw up-take through a 13-million GEF project on rangeland restoration in Jordan and Egypt.

► [Access the study.](#)

**Georgia:**

ELD's assessment informed the first ever law on pastures in Georgia, influenced the Georgian National Pastureland Management Policy Document and helped mobilize a 10-million GEF project on the restoration and sustainable management of degraded pasturelands in Georgia. ► [Access the study.](#)

**Kenya:**

ELD's assessment informed the National Agricultural Soil Management Policy in Kenya and supported the development of a rangeland management bill in Isiolo County and larger northern Kenya.

► [Access the study.](#)



# Transformative action for land

At the 2022 UNCCD COP 15 in Abidjan, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to restore one billion hectares of degraded land by 2030. This is in line with other ongoing international processes like the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the commitments for sustainable land management of CBD and UNFCCC. We are witnessing how a growing awareness is translating into commitments, but there remain significant gaps of political action, changes in enabling environments, and necessary investments needed for transformative change.

The major challenge going forward is to support decision-makers in taking action and implementing land solutions for transformative change.

There is the need and the window of opportunity now to go beyond awareness raising and to support decision-makers in translating the awareness, commitments, and visions for preserving the benefits of land in real political action and the implementation of necessary land solutions. The theme for the new ELD strategy will therefore be “transformative action for land”.

Two principal ideas guide ELD’s new strategy: Transformation and scale as well as collaboration and co-development.



**Transformation and scale:** The ELD Initiative continues to transition from raising awareness to informing decisions and bringing about change. It will work for concrete changes in decision-making and promote the use of transformative land solutions – that means sustainable land management practices, policy instruments and institutional design as well as financing solutions and strategies. ELD will increase its focus on scalability of its approaches, evidence, learnings, and solutions.

**Collaboration and co-development:** ELD will strengthen its unique position as a global partnership that works at the intersection of science, policy, and practice. This interface is at the core of the initiative. ELD understands itself as a space where those three perspectives can come together to drive transformation with best available, co-developed, policy and practice relevant science and knowledge. ELD will engage with key stakeholders, policy- and decision-makers, and leading experts to drive impact, while co-development of capacity, knowledge, evidence, solutions, and activities with stakeholders from the three dimensions of the ELD interface is in the centre of the initiative. ELD will strengthen its scientific foundation, build stronger linkages with relevant political actors, such as UNCCD and the other Rio Conventions, UN Organisations, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the EU, as well as other organisations, governments, and donors. ELD will also continue to leverage its unique institutional ties with its host organisation, GIZ, as well as access to projects of German bilateral cooperation.



#### **ELD's scope for its strategy "transformative action for land"**

ELD mobilizes best available, policy- and practice-relevant science and knowledge on the values of land and ecosystem services with the purpose to inform, promote, and scale transformative land solutions – these are three categories of land solutions:

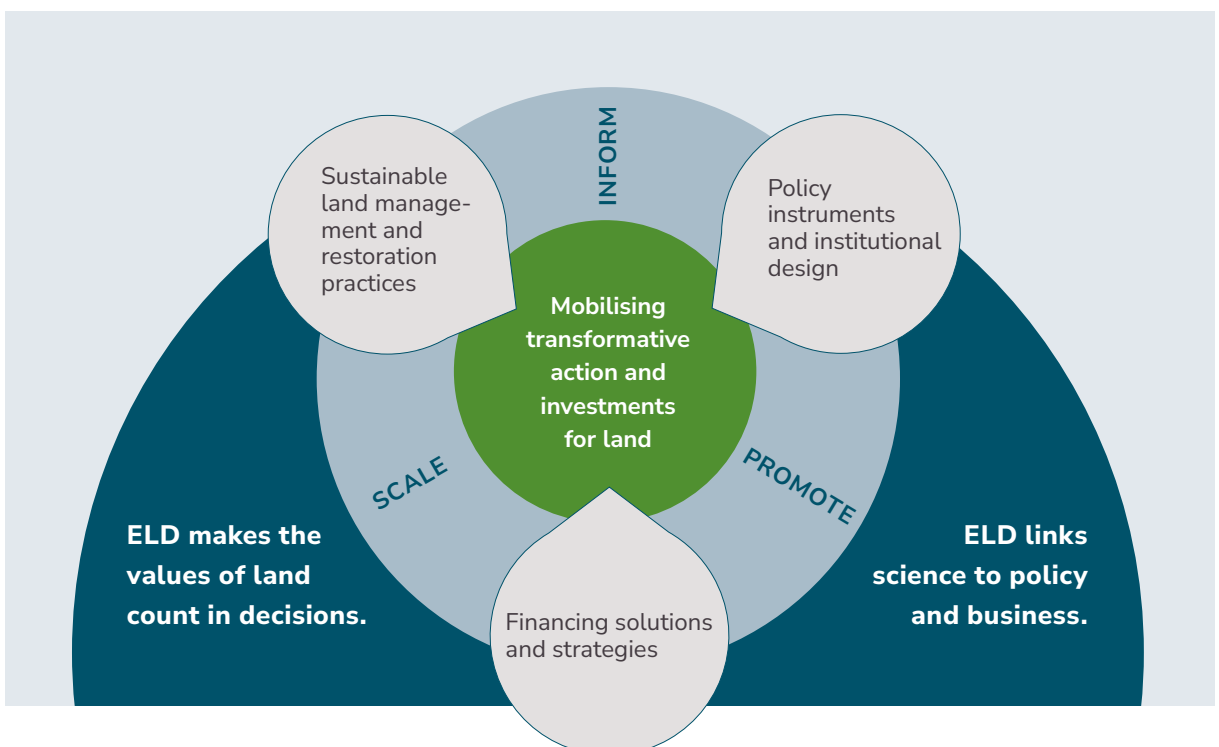
- i. Sustainable land management and restoration practices,**
- ii. Policy instruments and institutional design, and**
- iii. Financing solutions and strategies.**

# Our ambition

**Our vision:** The ELD Initiative aspires to a world in which land is managed in a sustainable manner that preserves and restores natural capital including soils, water, and biodiversity, enhances ecosystem services, ensures climate-resilient landscapes and food systems, provides livelihoods, and secures the well-being of people and the rest of nature. In this world, land degradation is at least net neutral and preferably significantly reversed.

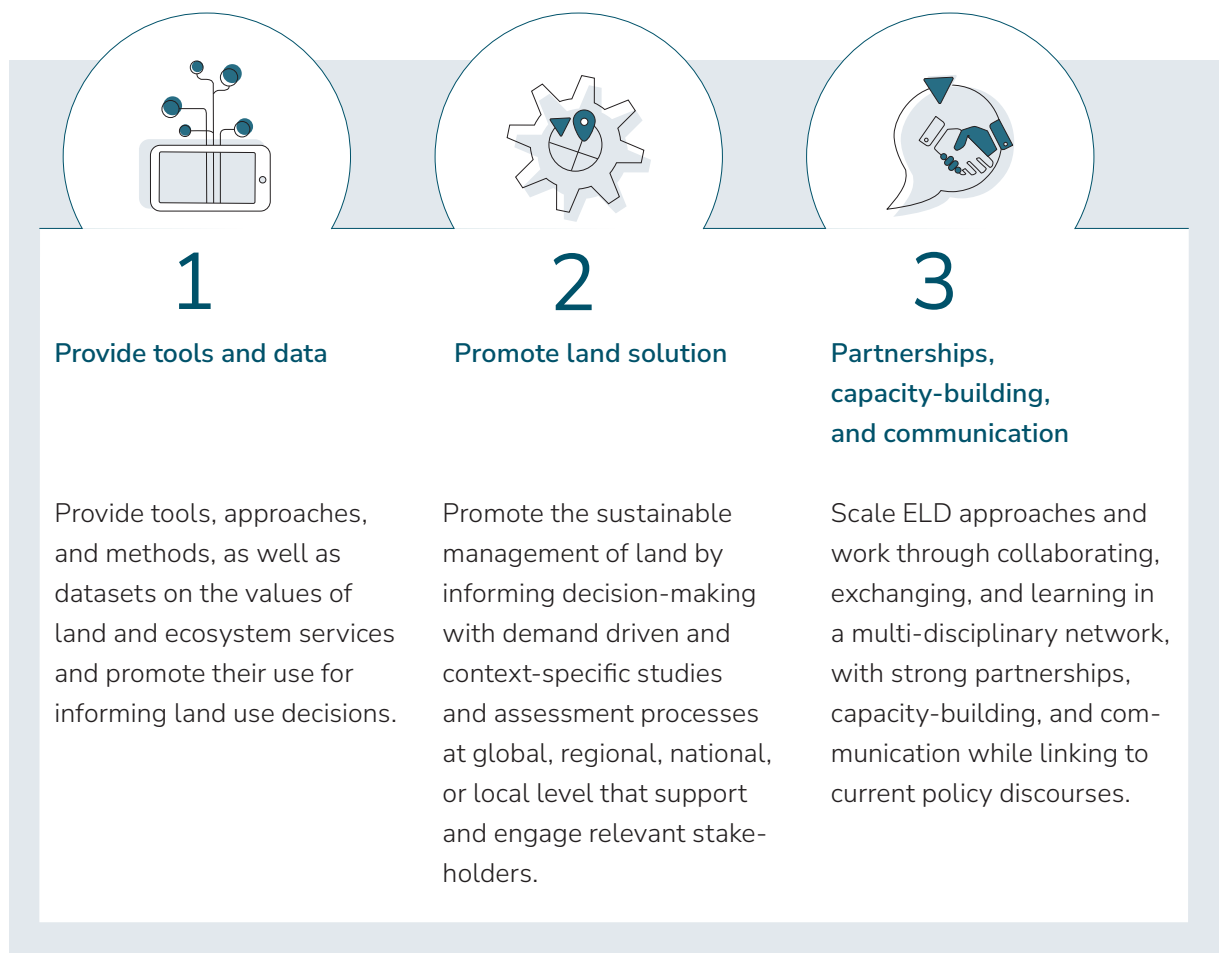
**Our mission:** The ELD Initiative makes the values of land and its ecosystem services count in decisions—hence uncovering the true costs and benefits of land degradation and sustainable land management. We do this with the aim to inform, promote, and scale land solutions for transformative change; these solutions include sustainable land management and restoration practices, policy instruments and institutional design, and financing solutions and strategies. In working at the science-policy-practice interface, ELD brings scientific knowledge and evidence into political and business discourses and decision making.

**FIGURE 3** ELD's strategy



# Our action areas

**FIGURE 4** The three action areas





## 1 Provide tools and data

**Provide tools, approaches, and methods, as well as datasets on the values of land and ecosystem services and promote their use for informing land use decisions.**

ELD aims for these tools, methods, etc. to be scientifically robust, standardized, aligned with other approaches, low-cost, and where feasible digital. Testing is an inherent part of the development. This action area will be strategically integrated with the other ELD action areas.

Activities include:

### I. Tools, approaches, and methods:

- › Methods and approaches for integrated assessments that include assessing, valuing, and mapping land and ecosystem services,
- › Decision support tools for land management and restoration projects, integrated land use planning, and other topics,
- › Scenario methods and integrated models to assess actionable development pathways, impacts as well as costs and benefits of land solutions,
- › Methods and approaches for tracking financial flows and identifying funding gaps in the context of LDN and land restoration,
- › Approaches, trainings, and guidance on the use of transformative land solutions.

### II. Datasets:

- › Contribution of data to existing datasets or development of new databases where needed.

## 2 Promote land solutions

**Promote the sustainable management of land by informing decision-making with demand driven and context-specific studies and assessment processes at global, regional, national, or local level that support and engage relevant stakeholders.**

ELD works on the assumption that action is taken when decision-makers are well informed about their range of options and their impacts, and when leadership and strong partners are involved and motivated to move forward. There is a need for a clear understanding of successful and context-specific measures that will lead to the desired changes (e.g., with effective legal, political, and economic instruments), and a balance between conflicting interests. ELD contributes to this with scientific analyses and evidence-based policy and investment recommendations. These analyses can be conducted at different



scales – local, national, regional, or global – with different target audiences, varying purposes – from awareness raising to informing concrete policy decisions or policy and finance instruments – and with a focus on each of the three land solutions categories. Assessments at country level are embedded within political change processes answering to specific policy and investment needs and implemented as inclusive, stakeholder driven processes. A co-development of pathways to impact with stakeholders is critical for the success and acceptance of such assessments. Capacity building activities (Action Area 3) will be integrated into these processes as needed.

Activities include:

- › Global, regional, or national-level assessments to raise awareness for topics of concern, for example, the values of land, costs and benefits of land solutions, the economics of droughts, financial flows for nature-based solutions, soil health, synergies between land-related interlinked targets of the three Rio conventions UNFCCC, UNCCD and CBD, or transformation and transformative potential of land solutions.
- › Conducting inclusive and participatory assessment processes at national, local, or regional level to enable change by providing relevant information for land-related decisions and by engaging with key stakeholders, policy and decision-makers, experts, and civil society representatives throughout the processes. These assessments are purpose driven and answer to specific needs in support of the use of transformative land solutions. They may entail assessments with cost-benefit analyses, return on investment calculations, valuation, and mapping of ecosystem services as well as scenarios that reflect land dynamics under the influence of anticipated policy decisions or options, impacts and design of economic, financial, and other policy instruments, as well as assessments to track financial flows, identify funding gaps and options to mobilize resources in the context of LDN and land restoration.

### **3 Partnerships, capacity-building, and communication**

**Scale ELD approaches and work through collaborating, exchanging, and learning in a multi-disciplinary network, with strong partnerships, capacity-building, and communication while linking to current policy discourses.**

The ELD Initiative consists of a global network of experts and works as a multi-disciplinary partnership between science, policy, and practice. The network engages with international stakeholders and decision-makers to align ELD's work to policy needs and to effectively integrate scientific results into policy processes. A vivid dialogue and peer exchange of knowledge both within ELD and externally is a prerequisite for ELD to unfold its full potential and put it to good use. ELD translates science in policy-relevant information and messages, promotes dialogue, fosters collaboration, shares experience, and strengthens capacities on the economics of land and its ecosystem services.



Activities include:

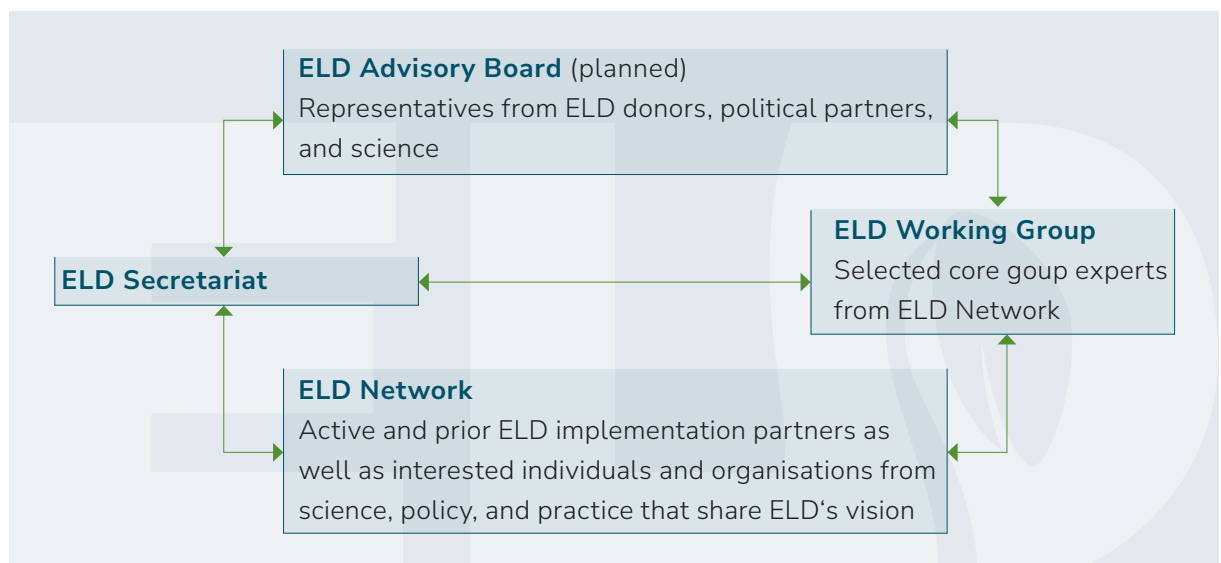
- › Communicate ELD work, messages, findings, and knowledge through appropriate and target group specific communication channels as well as events. The aim is to establish ELD as a visibly thought leading initiative and to create access to our work by a broad group of interested people and bodies.
- › Develop target group specific knowledge products (building on Action Areas 1 and 2) that link ELD work to the current political discourse with the aim to mainstream the topic and the importance of considering economic aspects in decision-making on land.
- › Engage in partnerships with international stakeholders and experts to share knowledge, experiences, joint learning, joint work, and projects.
- › Engage with internationally leading experts, practitioners, policy- and decision-makers as part of the ELD governance system and its respective bodies. Enable exchange among ELD network members through appropriate platforms and formats.
- › Provide capacity development formats to strengthen knowledge and capacities to integrate the true values of land and its ecosystem services in policy and practice as well as technical trainings on conducting ELD studies. Target group: national stakeholders, decision-makers, experts, university students and young professionals.

# ELD Initiative structure and governance

The ELD Initiative works at the interface of science, policy, and practice, and draws on a global network of committed professionals from science, policy, civil society, practice, international organisations, NGOs, development agencies, and consultancies. To strengthen its science-policy-practice interface and leverage the unique ELD partner engagement, the initiative will enhance the formalisation of its structures. The ELD Network of partners and the ELD Secretariat, which is currently hosted by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationalen Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), will continue to play an important role alongside two new ELD bodies: The ELD Working Group, which has been established in 2022, and the planned ELD Advisory Board.

In 2024 and beyond, ELD will establish a more sustainable and diversified finance structure, seeking core funding from other bilateral or multilateral donors in addition to the BMZ. In the course of a possible new and more diverse funding arrangement, the ELD Secretariat can also be hosted by other ELD partner institutions, according to ELD’s future funding and governance structures. The Advisory Board will be composed such that new constellations of ELD’s donors, hosts, and political partners will be represented in this body.

**FIGURE 5** ELD organigram







The ELD Network is a non-formalised network that brings together individuals and organisations that share ELD's vision and its ambition to move the topic forward as well as to exchange knowledge and experience on the economics of land and its ecosystem services.

The ELD Secretariat ensures that ELD is managed effectively, oriented towards existing demands, and financed sustainably, is a vibrant partnership of relevant actors, that its work and products are aligned with policy needs, that the Initiative is well networked both internally and externally, that it plays into relevant policy processes at international, national, and sub-national levels, that it has access to funding, and that it is communicated to a broad audience.

The ELD Working Group is the backbone of the ELD Initiative and ELD core group of selected experts from the ELD Network. The group convenes leading international experts from science, policy, and practice allowing for multiple perspectives and cross-sectoral thinking within the group. It contributes to the ELD Initiative with strategic, operational, and technical support, the development of project ideas in collaboration with the ELD Secretariat and their implementation. It contributes to further establish ELD as an internationally recognized initiative at the interface of science, policy, and practice and contributes to bring the new "ELD Strategy 2023-2030: Transformative Action for Land" to life. The group has been established in 2022.

The ELD Advisory Board once established will convene high-level representatives from ELD donors, political partners, international organisations. It will ensure linkages of ELD's work to policy and donor demands, give advice on ELD's fundamental strategic orientation, and amplify ELD's messages. The group is to be set up in the future.



ELD theory of change

Challenges	Activities	Outputs	Action area objectives	ELD objective	Land solutions	Transformative change
<p><b>Overall challenge:</b> Persistent failure to account for the true values of land and the ecosystem services its natural capital provides. As well as need for translating commitments and awareness into action.</p> <p><b>Specifically:</b> Lack of quality data, low-cost tools for decision making and scientifically robust economic analysis on costs and benefits of SLM and restoration and impacts of policies and investments.</p> <p>Despite the general economic and business case for SLM and restoration, lack of large scale implementation, lack of policy reforms for enabling environments and incentives and lack of investments from all sources.</p> <p>Lacking uptake of scientific evidence and knowledge in policy, business and practice.</p>	<p><b>Action Area 1:</b> <b>Provide tools and data</b> (1) Tools, approaches, methods (2) Datasets</p> <p><b>Action Area 2:</b> <b>Promote land solutions</b> (1) Global, regional studies (2) Case study processes</p> <p><b>Action Area 3:</b> <b>Partnerships, capacity-building and communication</b> (1) Communication (2) Events (3) ELD bodies (4) Capacity building</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Tools, methods and approaches developed</li> <li>› Datasets assembled and made available</li> <li>› Guidance documents published</li> <li>› Countries supported</li> <li>› Case studies implemented</li> <li>› Global and regional reports published</li> <li>› Policy dialogues or workshops organised</li> <li>› Trainings delivered</li> <li>› Events organised</li> <li>› Communication pieces prepared</li> <li>› Partnerships entered or established</li> <li>› Meetings of the ELD Working Group</li> </ul>	<p>Provide tools, approaches, and methods, as well as datasets on the values of land and ecosystem services and promote their use for informing land use decisions.</p> <p>Promote the sustainable management of land by informing decision-making with demand driven and context-specific studies and assessment processes at global, regional, national, or local level that support and engage relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Scale ELD approaches and work through collaborating, exchanging, and learning in a multi-disciplinary network, with strong partnerships, capacity-building, and communication while linking to current policy discourses.</p>	<p>The ELD Initiative makes the values of land and its ecosystem services count in decisions – hence uncovering the true costs and benefits of land degradation and sustainable land management.</p> <p>We do this in the aim to inform, promote, and scale land solutions for transformative change; these are sustainable land management and restoration practices, policy instruments and institutional design, and financing solutions and strategies.</p> <p>In working at the science-policy-practice interface, ELD brings scientific knowledge and evidence into political and business discourses and decision making.</p>	<p><b>Sustainable land management and restoration practices</b></p> <p><b>Policy instruments and institutional design</b></p> <p><b>Financing solutions and strategies</b></p>	<p>The ELD Initiative aspires to a world in which land is managed in a sustainable manner that preserves and restores natural capital including soils, water, and biodiversity, enhances ecosystem services, ensures climate-resilient landscapes and food systems, provides livelihoods, and secures the well-being of people and the rest of nature. In this world, land degradation is at least net neutral and preferably significantly reversed.</p>

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The Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative is a global initiative at the interface of science, policy, and practice that works to make the values of land count in decisions to inform, promote, and scale land solutions for transformative change.

[www.eld-initiative.org](http://www.eld-initiative.org)

