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## **Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention**

### **Twenty-second session**

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 3–11 December 2024

Item 2 (d) of the provisional agenda

**Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels**

**Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention**

## **Promotion of capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention**

**Note by the secretariat\***

### *Summary*

By its [decision 2/COP.15](#), the Conference of the Parties (COP) restated the importance of capacity-building to the effective implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The decision mandates the Convention institutions to continue enhancing all measures to support the facilitation of capacity development, including the pursuit of partnerships, especially in the areas of training, awareness-raising, drought mitigation, the achievement of land degradation and the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention's objectives.

The present document reports on activities implemented by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism in compliance with these mandates. It also contains conclusions and recommendations which the COP may consider, in conjunction with the relevant draft decision contained in document [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8/Add.1](#), in its deliberations on possible future actions to enhance capacity-building within the framework of the UNCCD.

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\* This document was scheduled for publication after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control as more time was required to finalize it.



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## I. Introduction

1. By its [decision 2/COP.15](#), the Conference of the Parties (COP) restated the importance of capacity-building to the effective implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and requested the secretariat to focus on widening the reach of capacity-building with regard to the general public. This would encompass targeted capacity-building to support the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention, expansion of the Capacity Building Marketplace (CBM), organization of on-demand media training activities for journalists, the continuous provision of training, and further strengthening of capacity-building activities to better address desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), as well as sand and dust storms (SDS).
2. In keeping with [decision 2/COP.15](#), the COP requested the Convention institutions to further strengthen and expand both formal and informal partnerships to better facilitate the UNCCD capacity-building process, especially in the areas of training, awareness-raising, drought mitigation, the achievement of land degradation neutrality (LDN), and the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention's objectives, wherever possible, contributing to a better understanding of synergies and coherence among the Rio conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements.
3. In keeping with the COP request in paragraph 3 of [decision 2/COP.15](#), this report outlines the activities undertaken by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) in accordance with their respective mandates. It highlights achievements made challenges faced, and provides detail on some of the innovative measures taken to promote a more effective implementation of capacity-building activities within the framework of the UNCCD.
4. This document further highlights the major benefits of approaching capacity-building from the perspective of achieving synergies between Rio conventions if implemented, as appropriate, in collaboration with other Rio processes, which could reduce costs and improve the overall approach to capacity-building at all levels.

## II. Targeted capacity-building to support implementation

### A. General support for targeted capacity-building

5. The COP, in reaffirming that capacity-building is essential for the effective implementation of the Convention (see [decision 2/COP.15](#)), underlined the need to continue to enhance and increase efforts in this regard. This section of the report highlights actions undertaken by the secretariat and the GM to facilitate targeted capacity-building by conducting and promoting a series of activities which are briefly outlined below.

#### *Children and the UNCCD programme*

6. In order to help introduce schoolchildren to the importance of land to their lives, the secretariat designed and launched the "Children and the UNCCD programme" which introduces primary and secondary schoolchildren to the need to take proper care of land. The means of achieving this vary, including a number of creative approaches, such as paintings, posters, drama, tree-planting, presentations and discussions. So far, the programme has proven extremely popular and successful. For the period under review, schools in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean have been involved in this programme.<sup>1</sup>
7. The Art Story drawing competition, "Painting A Beautiful World: A Children's Art Story", invited children to harness their imagination and artistic gifts by visualizing their perceptions about the land they inhabit. The competition was launched in 2022 and concluded in 2023, with 273 submissions from 41 countries. A key achievement of the project was teaching children to: (i) appreciate the huge significance of land in their daily lives; (ii) become future stewards of healthy land; (iii) connect with other children in the shared quest

<sup>1</sup> Children and the UNCCD: <https://knowledge.unccd.int/cbm/children-and-unccd-florence-italy-2021>.

to protect the land; and (iv) gain greater awareness of the importance of sustainable development to ensure a secure future for the children of the world. The submitted drawings conveyed messages around environmental awareness while showcasing the uniqueness of nature, cultures and regional landscapes.

8. Following the Art Story drawing competition, an online exhibition was launched in 2023 to showcase the submissions. This reached a wider audience as the exhibition link was shared on different media.

9. In 2023, a series of educational materials was launched, targeting young children up to the age of 12. The first materials in the series were a children's booklet and accompanying workbook, focusing on sustainable land management (SLM) and drought. The booklet features pictures and brief explanations about the importance of caring for our land, which are engaging and interactive for children. The workbook encourages children to paint, colour, draw, write short stories, solve puzzles, and more. It also gives children the option to connect with other children from around the world. These two initial educational tools proved popular and entertaining, while giving young children the chance to showcase their talents and creativity.<sup>2</sup>

#### *UNCCD career mentoring empowerment programmes for young people*

10. In keeping with the goal of increasing targeted capacity-building to support the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention, special attention was paid to the issue of gender balance in the recruitment of interns. This programme continues to develop and grow and remains a coveted internship within the United Nations system.

11. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the secretariat decided to start a remote/distance internship programme. This approach enabled more young professionals to engage in this programme due to a lack of restrictions around office space and the location of interns. As a result, the UNCCD Capacity Building and Innovation subprogramme offered more training opportunities than expected to young people around the globe.

12. Following the highly successful and acclaimed general internship programme offered by the secretariat's Capacity Building subprogramme which, over the years, opened windows of opportunity for many young people, in August 2021, the secretariat launched a special internship programme targeted at young professionals in least developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) that are Parties to the Convention. This programme continues to offer educational and training opportunities for participants in many fields related to UNCCD implementation. The secretariat pays special attention to gender parity when recruiting these interns. The programme has been effective and young professionals from these countries have shown a keen interest in joining the internship.

13. Realizing that capacity-building should be coordinated among the three Rio conventions and acknowledging the growing need to mentor young people on DLDD issues and further enhance their capacities, the UNCCD developed the Fellowship programme. Through ongoing collaboration, the UNCCD shared the fellowship idea with its two sister conventions. In the years that followed, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has successfully implemented this idea in the form of: (i) the Capacity Award Programme to Advance Capabilities and Institutional Training in one Year (CAPACITY) Fellowship Programme; and (ii) the early career joint fellowship programme.

14. In 2022, the secretariat developed a special fellowship geared towards supporting the development of young professionals. Subject to the availability of funding, the programme was intended to be piloted in LDCs and SIDS that are Parties to the Convention. The objectives of this programme are to:

(a) Train early career professionals who, upon returning home, will then work in areas relating to the implementation of the Convention;

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/resources/other/children-and-unccd-booklet-and-workbook>.

- (b) Support the creation of a cadre of young professionals who then engage in training and mentoring others in disciplines related to the implementation of the Convention;
- (c) Strengthen institutional capacities in LDCs and SIDS;
- (d) Offer more opportunities to young female professionals working in SLM and DLDD matters.

15. However, due to a lack of resources, the secretariat has not been able to implement this programme.

16. Under the umbrella of the fellowship and mentorship programme concept, the Science-Policy Interface (SPI), in liaison with the secretariat, has designed and piloted the Early Career Scientist Fellowship Programme. This is a pro bono secretariat-administered fellowship programme designed to provide opportunities for outstanding early career individuals to contribute to the delivery of the SPI work programme.<sup>3</sup>

*Women and the UNCCD Through the Years project*

17. To continue targeted capacity-building and support the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention, the secretariat has developed and launched the “Women and the UNCCD Through the Years project”. This project aims to put faces and voices to the actions of women around the world who are working in every aspect and area of SLM, thereby inspiring others to take action to support the implementation of the UNCCD. The project, inter alia, allows women to access capacity-building opportunities while encouraging those who provide such opportunities to use this project to disseminate their offers.<sup>4</sup>

*Capacity-building lectures, seminars and webinar series*

18. The Capacity Building and Innovation subprogramme continued its lecture series in universities and schools over the period under review. Lecture series focusing on the importance of SLM and the central role of UNCCD on the land agenda have been offered to students from primary school to university level, and continue to be very successful. During the period under review, various workshops and lectures were held for different institutions, including the University of Wageningen, the University of Bonn and the University of Cologne. In collaboration with the Center for Development Research (ZEF) of the University of Bonn, a seminar on the importance of land to the work of UNCCD was organized for the African Climate and Environment Center – Future African Savannas (AFAS) programme. The seminar was attended by 35 postgraduate students and staff from various parts of the African continent. In addition, students have visited the United Nations Campus from various universities and interest groups, such as the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA), whose visit included the attendance of young female farmers from Africa. There is a growing demand for the lecture series to be expanded.

19. Under the overarching support of the Government of the People's Republic of China for the UNCCD, during the 2022–2024 triennium, the secretariat, in collaboration with the Ningxia Forestry and Grassland Administration of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region of China, organized three international training seminars focusing on desertification control techniques and practices. The first training seminar was held virtually from 28 September to 2 October 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions. This was followed by two in-person training seminars from 19 to 25 September 2023 and 19 to 26 September 2024. These seminar events involved 70 participants from over 35 countries and many local experts from across China.

*Internal staff training*

20. During the 2022–2024 triennium, the Capacity Building and Innovation subprogramme organized an internal staff orientation and training session in preparation for

<sup>3</sup> Further information on the Science-Policy Interface Early Career Scientist Fellowship Programme can be found in document [ICCD/COP\(15\)/CST/5](#).

<sup>4</sup> Women and the UNCCD Through the Years project: <https://knowledge.unccd.int/cbm/call-content-women-world-and-unccd>.

the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 21) held in Uzbekistan.

*Targeted capacity-building through the Capacity Building Marketplace (CBM)*

21. The CBM has made remarkable achievements over the years which are appreciated by Parties and the wider public, and reaffirmed by various COP decisions. Despite these significant achievements, the full functioning of the CBM is hampered by a number of challenges relating to, inter alia, inadequate staffing, budgetary limitations and structural developments during the integration of the CBM into the main rebranded and redesigned UNCCD website. The CBM remained operational but is currently inactive and on temporal hold.

22. The entire capacity-building and innovation subprogramme under the Science, Technology and Innovation unit was spearheaded by one official who left the secretariat at the end of 2023. Subsequently, the vacated position was temporarily frozen on budgetary grounds. As part of efforts to make services provided to Parties more effective and efficient, the secretariat will, in the 2025–2026 biennium, fill this position, resuscitate the CBM vehicle, and explore pathways and undertake steps towards an innovation-driven UNCCD. These efforts, among others, will be aimed at upscaling capacity-building and development initiatives as well as facilitating the diffusion of innovative solutions to achieve LDN and enhance drought and people's resilience.

*Targeted capacity-building through the "UNCCD e-Learning Platform for Capacity Building"*

23. In its efforts to make the UNCCD e-Learning Platform for Capacity Building<sup>5</sup> more responsive, efficient and effective, the secretariat developed and launched new e-learning courses covering various important subjects, including the structure and functioning of key bodies. The new courses cover the following topics:

(a) Soils: This e-Learning course, launched in 2022, helps the learner better understand the importance of soil and how it impacts on human lives. It provides technical knowledge and innovative, sustainable soil and land management solutions;

(b) Structure and functions/role of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST): This e-learning course on CST provides training for UNCCD Science and Technology Correspondents;

(c) Drought 101: This e-learning course provides participants with substantive knowledge of droughts, their impacts and possible solutions;

(d) Youth, land and the Sustainable Development Goals: This e-learning course educates young people about the importance of land to sustainable development;

(e) A series of e-learning video tutorials were developed for the 2022 UNCCD national reporting process, as detailed in Section III.

24. While some of these courses specifically target UNCCD stakeholders, they are open to all and can be taken by the general public. In the development of these courses, significant attention was paid to the issue of targeted capacity-building to support the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention when and where relevant. This can clearly be seen, for example, in the courses on drought and youth, land and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The secretariat is in the process of translating its courses on the platform into French, Russian and Spanish.

## **B. Supporting Parties in achieving land degradation neutrality**

25. Several issues have emerged regarding the capacity of country Parties to effectively deliver on LDN implementation. It is critically important to build the capacities of National

<sup>5</sup> <https://unccd-capacitybuildingmarketplace.moodlecloud.com/>.

Focal Points (NFP) to navigate the complexities that will allow ease of access to the broad range of grants, and concessional and private finance options.

26. In the last biennium, the GM has focused on strategic investment and joint planning events between NFPs and stakeholders with direct access to funding opportunities. This has involved bringing together national stakeholders from different ministries, notably the ministries of finance and planning, with the finance focal points of vertical funds, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund. The GM particularly appreciates the willingness of technical partners, including Multilateral Development Banks, and bilateral and private funders, to dedicate time to capacity-building by showcasing opportunities that will allow NFPs to access non-traditional financing sources and leverage climate or innovative financing models. The partnership approach has been critical in this regard.

27. There are additional efforts to be made in terms of upskilling NFPs in comprehensive financing gap assessments to identify and prioritize funding needs and make the business case for private sector investment based on a different rationale.

28. On the technical front, decision support for LDN target-setting is particularly crucial. The LDN Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP) provides training and knowledge-sharing opportunities to participant countries and relevant stakeholders on the LDN TSP building blocks (i.e. leveraging LDN, assessing LDN, setting voluntary LDN targets and associated measures, and achieving LDN). The early stages of the LDN TSP2.0 process have identified gaps in skills and knowledge relating to behavioural change communications, integrated land use planning, and the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. Funded by the GEF and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a project has been signed with the GM, kick-starting a first wave of capacity-building activities in the coming biennium. However, it is anticipated that needs in these areas will be considerable. Strengthening capacities in these technical areas will ensure that country Parties can effectively plan, adopt appropriate technologies, and make informed decisions to achieve their LDN targets and combat land degradation. The planning and mapping process would also make the resource mobilization efforts more streamlined.

29. This is consistent with efforts deployed for the Great Green Wall (GGW) and the Sahel project, where capacity-building and technical support during the past biennium have targeted the consolidation of progress data and GGW project funding data on a digital platform, demonstrating an inclusive and transparent approach to project funding and highlighting the results expected by 2030. This unique data-sharing structure affirms and demonstrates our evidence-based resource mobilization approach.

### **C. Continuation of targeted capacity-building to support the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention**

30. Several activities were undertaken to build capacity on gender equality in relation to DLDD, focusing on topics including what constitutes a gender-responsive approach, how to conduct a gender analysis, intersectionality and inclusion, prevention of sexual harassment, gender and climate action, and how to support women farmer associations and women environmental defenders. These activities were carried out in collaboration with the Group of 20 (G20) Landwise webinar series, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Landesa, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and accredited civil society organizations (CSO). The target participants for these capacity-building sessions included NFPs, Parties, UNCCD staff, new interns in the onboarding process, CSOs and other stakeholders.

31. To celebrate International Day of Rural Women in October 2023, the secretariat held a capacity-building workshop in coordination with the FAO, UNEP and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), highlighting the Central Eastern Europe experience in empowering rural women working in the agricultural sector through policy innovation and the key role of women farmer associations.

Presentations were made by nine Parties, in addition to United Nations agency representatives and farmer associations.

32. In addition, in collaboration with the GM, a session was held to update the Africa Group (Annex 1) on gender and land tenure issues and activities subsequent to CRIC 21. Presentations on the UNCCD's gender framework were made at regional meetings of all Annexes. The UNCCD also co-organized gender-themed side events at the Land Pavilion at the UNFCCC COP 28 in collaboration with UN Women, the IUCN, FAO and Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WeCAN). In the third quarter of 2024, a gender capacity needs assessment will be conducted. Based on this assessment, a comprehensive capacity development plan will be developed for NFPs, the secretariat and stakeholders.

33. In addition, the secretariat has made very deliberate efforts in other areas including:

(a) Recruiting more female staff in general, including in senior management positions as well as consultants;

(b) Firmly promoting the participation of women as panellists in webinars and panel discussions;

(c) Developing special training sessions focusing on the issues of gender responsiveness;

(d) Analysing gender parity across the Convention, with recommendations for improving the balance of men and women in national delegations, bodies and entities under the UNCCD;

(e) Developing and formalizing the initial implementation of the first-ever UNCCD Gender Policy governing internal structure, processes and procedures.

34. The secretariat and the GM undertook several other actions and activities in their efforts to fulfil their respective mandates as regards the continuation of targeted capacity-building to support the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention. These additional actions are detailed in document [ICCD/COP\(16\)/17](#).

#### **D. Facilitation of the development of training materials for journalists**

35. On 19 March 2024, the secretariat held a Science Media Communications Training session for SPI members. The session was designed to bridge the gap between media and scientists and included interactive and hands-on sessions featuring on-camera interviews.

36. Several media training activities were also conducted in the lead-up to Desertification and Drought Day 2024 and COP 16. On 8 May, UNCCD spokespeople completed a spokesperson media training session to prepare them for media interactions ahead of COP 16. From 12 to 17 June, on the sidelines of the 60th session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Science and Technological Advice (SBSTA), and Desertification and Drought Day in Bonn, the UNCCD and UNFCCC jointly organized a training session for Russian-speaking journalists. This training provided world-class expertise and exclusive media coverage opportunities before the high-level United Nations environmental conferences, particularly UNCCD COP 16 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in December 2024. It featured lectures, discussions, and in-person participation in various events.

37. As part of preparations for COP 16, Saudi Arabia held a national media training session on 6 May 2024. This training focused on the linkages between land management, climate change and biodiversity, with additional support from the UNCCD.

38. The UNCCD secretariat also organized a media training session in Abidjan from 2 to 6 September 2024 for French-speaking journalists covering Africa. The training aimed to deepen their understanding of desertification, SLM and the critical role of the media in disseminating best practices. Journalists from 15 African countries working for national press agencies and as correspondents for global media in their respective countries participated in the interactive five-day media workshop which included a field visit. More than 30 articles were published by the participants on their media outlets. A media training session for



Arabic-speaking journalists from the Middle East and North Africa region is also scheduled to take place shortly before COP 16.

## **E. Co-learning for drought risk reduction and resilience**

39. In [decision 23/COP.15](#), Parties requested the secretariat to encourage, support and facilitate communities of learning and practice to pursue co-learning and collaboration for capacity-building issues regarding drought risk reduction and resilience.

40. The secretariat had a joint event with the Bonn Water Network (BWN) on World Water Day involving the city of Bonn, local universities and students. This joint session provided a chance for the SPI and the BWN to share relevant activities, research results and case studies that may benefit the future work and the activities of both. The contributions focused on the role of science-policy interfaces in understanding and governing the land-water nexus.

41. In response, the UNCCD, in collaboration with the Global Water Partnership, developed the Community of Learning and Practice (CLP) on Drought Management<sup>6</sup> with the objective of: (i) enhancing the knowledge and technical capacities of national actors and key stakeholders working on drought and desertification management, including through the use of the UNCCD Drought Toolbox;<sup>7</sup> (ii) promoting the adoption, replication and up-scaling of integrated and inclusive drought management practices; (iii) supporting the design and development of integrated drought management policies and governance frameworks; and (iv) building trust, cooperation and a shared sense of identification among national actors and other key stakeholders working on drought. At the time this document was written, the CLP had a global platform and three regional platforms based on the UNCCD Regional Implementation Annexes, including one for Asia, one for Latin America and the Caribbean, and a joint one for Central and Eastern Europe and Northern Mediterranean countries. The launch of the regional platform for Africa was planned for September 2024. For all the activated platforms, the secretariat has organized a (pre-) launch activity and other events for drought professionals, such as webinars. There are currently more than 150 registered users, including NFPs, other government representatives, international organization officials, researchers, civil society members, and other stakeholders. Further information on the CLP can be found in document [ICCD/COP\(16\)/15](#).

## **F. Targeted capacity-building to address sand and dust storms**

42. [Decision 26/COP.15](#) invited the secretariat, within its scope and mandate and subject to the availability of financial resources, and partners to provide, upon request, support to Parties for the design and implementation of national plans and policies to address SDS sources and impacts related to DLDD. The same decision requested the secretariat and the GM, within the scope and mandate of the Convention, subject to the availability of financial resources and in collaboration with partners, to develop a voluntary policy guideline, in consultation with countries affected by SDS, to assist in the integration of SDS management into key policy areas.

43. In response, the UNCCD and FAO produced the Guideline on the Integration of Sand and Dust Storm Management Into Key Policy Areas,<sup>8</sup> which is voluntary and can be used by regional, national, and subnational authorities and actors responsible for formulating and implementing SDS initiatives in key policy areas. It aims to raise awareness of development challenges related to SDS risk, vulnerability and exposure that are often not fully appreciated or considered by policymakers. The guideline outlines the principles and enabling environment to prevent and reduce SDS sources and their social, economic and environmental impacts while improving productivity and resilience.

<sup>6</sup> <https://droughtclp.unccd.int>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/drought/toolbox>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/guideline-integration-sand-and-dust-storm-management-key-policy-areas>.

44. The secretariat, in collaboration with partners, launched the SDS toolbox<sup>9</sup> on 12 July 2023 to mark the first observation of the International Day of Combating SDS. The secretariat continues to update the content and refine the functionality to ensure easy access for stakeholders to innovative approaches, methods, tools and technologies, supported by case studies and other resources, to inform the design and implementation of SDS policy and planning at various levels.

### III. Targeted capacity-building to support national reporting

45. Capacity-building for reporting has always been part of the core services provided by the Convention institutions. Capacity-building for the 2022 reporting process was generously funded by the GEF as part of the Global Support Programme aimed at strengthening country Party capacity in relation to UNCCD monitoring and reporting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face regional capacity development meetings could not be undertaken during the 2022 reporting process. Thus, the Convention institutions, in consultation with the Bureau of the CRIC, decided to design and implement online capacity development activities, including: (i) a series of 16 e-learning video tutorials in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish which provide reporting guidance, indicator by indicator, for the UNCCD reporting platform, the Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS); and (ii) two additional tutorials in English on the use of Trends.Earth,<sup>10</sup> developed by Conservation International. The e-learning tutorials have been disseminated through the UNCCD Capacity Building Marketplace YouTube channel. Furthermore, the Convention institutions hired and trained a team of 11 international technical experts which provided Parties with a close assistance throughout the 2022 reporting process via the help desk system, e-mail exchanges, bilateral virtual meetings, subregional webinars and the PRAIS in-built revision and review system for the technical review of national reports. More information on the capacity development activities organized for the 2022 reporting process can be found in document [ICCD/CRIC\(21\)/7](#).

46. During the 2022 UNCCD reporting process, a series of e-learning video tutorials were developed to offer guidance, indicator by indicator, on reporting on the new PRAIS platform. These are available in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

47. Following the completion of the 2022 reporting process, the UNCCD secretariat, in collaboration with the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) developed the “The Land Story - Country experiences with reporting on land degradation and drought” publication.<sup>11</sup> This provides an insight into the range of approaches countries have taken to overcome challenges related to data availability, reliability, analysis and upload, digital and geospatial literacy, as well as sufficient and timely financial resources.

48. Following recommendations made by Parties at CRIC 21, as contained in document [ICCD/CRIC\(21\)/11](#), capacity-building for the 2026 reporting process will be delivered with the financial support of the GEF in a hybrid format blending both in-person and online approaches. The capacity-building services provided are broken down into the following categories:

- (a) E-learning video tutorials and online question and answer events;
- (b) Regional workshops;
- (c) Technical backstopping;
- (d) Help desk services.

49. Building on the e-learning method which was pioneered in the 2022 reporting process, the secretariat will update the 2022 e-learning video tutorials based on methodological improvements to the indicators as well as changes to reporting modalities in PRAIS.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/sand-and-dust-storms/toolbox>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://docs.trends.earth/en/latest/index.html>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/land-story-country-experiences-reporting-land-degradation-and-drought>.

Additional tutorials on the use of Trends.Earth will be made available in collaboration with Conservation International.

50. Furthermore, in 2024, the secretariat launched, in collaboration with the FAO, and with support from the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality (GEO-LDN) Flagship and GIZ, the new certified e-learning course, “Using land-cover information to monitor progress on Sustainable Development Goal 15”, which is now available free of charge on the FAO eLearning Academy. Building on this success, GEO-LDN is planning to develop two more e-learning courses, one in 2024 and one in 2025, on topics of high relevance to national reporting and LDN implementation.

51. In collaboration with host governments and/or suitable regional/subregional partner organizations, the secretariat will organize international workshops for all Parties to build country capacity in order to effectively complete their national reports. Given that the UNCCD monitoring and indicator framework includes SDG indicator 15.3.1 and several geospatial indicators, it is recommended that participants from National Statistical Offices and Geographic Information System (GIS) experts be included in the nominations made by Parties. The frequency and size of these face-to-face meetings will be further considered, also considering possible back-to-back meetings with partners working on similar issues with UNCCD Parties. Joint regional capacity-building activities could be envisaged, e.g. with the FAO team responsible for SDG Indicator 15.4.2: Mountain Green Cover Index and Proportion of Degraded Mountain Area, which uses the same methodology for land cover as SDG Indicator 15.3.1. This could save resources and maximize the participation of Parties in mountainous regions. Providers and producers of default data and tools for reporting would be invited, where feasible and subject to the availability of financial resources, to participate as trainers in the regional workshops.

52. The 2026 reporting process will also attempt to leverage the skills, resources and experience of regional centers of excellence when rolling out capacity-building and technical assistance to Parties, where feasible.<sup>12</sup> The Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management, for example, already assists Caribbean SIDS and is strongly committed to their national LDN target-setting processes. The secretariat will further build on these experiences and seek to coordinate the regional capacity-building workshops with these centres.

## **IV. Partnerships to facilitate capacity-building and development**

53. By its [decision 2/COP.15](#), paragraph 2, Parties stipulated that the Convention institutions should, subject to available resources, further strengthen and expand both formal and informal partnerships to better facilitate the UNCCD capacity-building process and broaden their scope of cooperation with all relevant public and private sector entities, including relevant regional and subregional entities. In seeking to carry out this mandate, the secretariat continues in its efforts to build these partnerships. These efforts are wide-ranging in that they seek partnerships able to support all aspects of the capacity-development process.

### **A. Partnerships and collaborations in capacity-building to facilitate the achievement of land degradation neutrality**

54. In line with the revised UNCCD partnership strategy,<sup>13</sup> the secretariat has worked with a number of strategic partners to deliver on the capacity-building mandate of the UNCCD to achieve LDN and SLM. This included, inter alia, collaborations with the SPI, GEO-LDN, Conservation International, WOCAT and the G20 Global Land Initiative (G20-GLI).

55. The SPI and the French Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD) jointly organized a multi-stakeholder debate on the role of land in the sustainable development agenda on 12 September 2023 in Montpellier, France. The event was organized with support from the UNCCD secretariat, the French Government and several French scientific

<sup>12</sup> See also document: [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/7-ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/8](#).

<sup>13</sup> See document: [ICCD/COP\(16\)/4](#).

organizations, namely CSFD, the European and International Action Directorate of the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion, and the Agriculture, Rural Development and Biodiversity Division of the French Development Agency. The event addressed the issues of: (i) capitalizing on the synergies between CSFD and the SPI, targeting the achievement of LDN; (ii) the importance of the Science-Politics-Society dialogue, based on concrete examples of the work of the SPI; and (iii) priorities on the UNCCD science agenda, including, sustainable land use systems, aridity trends and impacts in the context of land degradation and climate change, and SDS.

56. The secretariat strengthened its collaboration with the GEO, a partnership of over 100 national governments and over 100 participating organizations that envisions a world where trusted Earth observations and intelligence are universally accessible and empower society to achieve a sustainable future. The GEO-LDN contributed to global efforts to develop capacity in the measurement and mapping of degraded lands and support the achievement of LDN through a series of activities, including:

(a) The International LDN Postgraduate Programme at the University of Energy and Natural Resources in Ghana. The programme started in 2023 and is the first of its kind to specifically educate future leaders on LDN;

(b) The organization of the Global Dialogue Forum from 2 to 4 November 2023 in Cape Town, South Africa.<sup>14</sup> The forum was envisaged as the first in a series of global and/or regional dialogue fora aimed at facilitating peer-to-peer exchange and in-person support in relation to national LDN achievement challenges, through integrated land use planning instruments and the use of geospatial data. It was attended by 14 intersectoral country teams, selected from 59 applications received through an open call. Following the forum, support has continued via regular online sessions for country clusters, where experts from the GEO-LDN have offered in-depth advice on identified LDN challenges;

(c) The Capacity Accelerator Network (CAN) process in cooperation with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.<sup>15</sup> Under the CAN process, teams from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana and Nigeria have been trained and supported by an expert in working on national LDN challenges;

(d) A series of GEO-LDN online-seminars which support country planners and decision-makers in using analytic tools and data for monitoring and reporting on LDN, and provide an exchange platform for data users, data providers and tool developers;<sup>16</sup>

(e) In-person training events on LDN at GEO Week 2022 and prior to the seventh AfriGEO symposium in 2023;

(f) A training session for trainers on the LDN Toolbox<sup>17</sup> at the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD) in Nairobi in 2023;

(g) The establishment of a regional GEO-LDN helpdesk at RCMRD in 2024.<sup>18</sup>

57. In December 2022, the secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Conservation International to strengthen and broaden the collaboration. The main purpose of the collaboration is to address the development of cutting-edge tools to support science, technology and innovation for the implementation of the UNCCD. This includes the development of capacity among Parties, Indigenous peoples and local communities to take ownership of the data and the tools needed to achieve LDN, and to recognize the role of land as a key part of the solution in achieving climate stability and transitioning to a nature-positive world.

58. The secretariat continued working closely with WOCAT, within the context of the MoU signed in February 2020 regarding the WOCAT 2020+ Initiative. The aim of this initiative is to establish a leading platform of expertise and transformative force in supporting

<sup>14</sup> [https://geo-ldn.org/events/gdf\\_2023/](https://geo-ldn.org/events/gdf_2023/).

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.data4sdgs.org/initiatives/capacity-accelerator-network>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://geo-ldn.org/events/geo-ldn-seminars/>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://geo-ldn.org/ldn/about-toolbox/>.

<sup>18</sup> Users can submit requests via e-mail ([helpdesk@geo-ldn.org](mailto:helpdesk@geo-ldn.org)) to receive support from trained staff.

countries and institutions globally in scaling up SLM, and fostering the achievement of the SDGs addressed by the three Rio conventions, particularly LDN. Within the framework of this initiative:

(a) Based on [decisions 11/COP.15](#), [19/COP.15](#) and [20/COP.15](#), WOCAT promoted the analysis, dissemination, and accessibility of SLM best practices through the designated WOCAT global SLM database;<sup>19</sup>

(b) Over the past three years, WOCAT, in collaboration with the FAO and some countries, has used cloud computing to co-develop easy-to-use applications to support multi-stakeholder participatory processes to map land degradation, and to assist decision-makers with LDN Decision Support Systems (LDN-DSS). The applications provide dynamic interfaces for GIS experts and non-experts to integrate local and national data alongside global information. The LDN-DSS allow users to implement the convergence of evidence principle when mapping land degradation, as introduced in the World Atlas of Desertification;

(c) A medium-sized project (MSP) funded by the GEF and co-led by the UNDP, UNCCD and WOCAT, will aim to scale up the capacity of UNCCD Parties to offer inclusive decision-making support to help achieve LDN using tailor-made LDN-DSS. While a limited number of countries, particularly in regions with specific challenges (e.g. SIDS, hyper arid areas), will receive targeted support through the project, South-South exchange workshops and learning events (online and physical) will be organized amongst participating countries and other interested non-participating Parties and actors. Where possible, the capacity-building efforts outlined in the MSP will be synchronized and connected to regional capacity-building workshops for national reporting organized by the secretariat to save resources and maximize participation.

## **B. Fostering collaboration on drought impact mitigation capacity-building activities**

59. The secretariat and the GM, with the FAO as executing agency, have been collaborating on the implementation of a GEF project with a focus on enabling activities for the implementation of UNCCD COP drought decisions. Within the framework of this project, regional workshops focusing on the alignment of national drought plans with national action plans have been organized in collaboration with various partners, including the Integrated Drought Management Programme, World Meteorological Organization, FAO and Global Water Partnership. The countries were selected based on “multi-criteria assessment of national drought plans”.<sup>20</sup> The workshop for the Asia and Europe regions, held in Istanbul, Türkiye, from 17 to 19 May 2023, included 15 participants from five countries (Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka). The Latin America and the Caribbean workshop held in Bogota, Colombia, from 1 to 3 August 2023 brought together six countries (Colombia, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Honduras, Panama) with 21 participants. The Africa workshop was held in Lusaka, Zambia, from 5 to 7 September 2023, including 14 countries (Algeria, Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Eswatini, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe) with 42 participants. In total 26 countries and 78 participants were involved. In addition, the secretariat and the FAO organized a regional workshop on planning for integrated drought management with a specific focus on Central Asian countries, held in Istanbul, Türkiye, from 16 to 18 October 2023.

60. The secretariat, in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (EC-JRC), has initiated a project to create a Global Drought Atlas for policymakers to be launched at COP 16. This effort is being led by the International Centre on Environmental Monitoring (CIMA) Research Foundation, the EU-JRC, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and United Nations University.

<sup>19</sup> See also: [ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/5](#).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-09/cc1276en.pdf>.

61. In addition, the secretariat, with partners including GIZ and the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, is working on a flagship publication on the “Economics of Drought Resilience”. The report provides evidence and future scenarios that demonstrate the economic case for nature-based and sustainable land use practices to enhance the resilience of land, different agricultural value chains and communities to increasing drought events. It will be launched at COP 16.

### **C. Joint capacity-building programme with the Rio conventions**

62. When looking at the areas of synergies among the Rio conventions, the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) identified capacity-building as part of its strategic efforts to enhance coordination and coherence in the implementation of the three Rio conventions. In light of the interconnected nature of the biodiversity, climate change and land degradation crises, the JLG has started work to enhance and support domestic capacity development for integrated implementation to promote a sustainable planet for future generations.<sup>21</sup>

63. The Joint Capacity-building Programme aims to strengthen the capacities of relevant national institutions and individual policymakers and practitioners to integrate and foster synergies between the three Rio conventions. In addition to providing training on what the three conventions entail, the Programme also aims to strengthen individual, institutional and systemic capacities, structurally engage with relevant partners and provide high-quality resource material on a set of themes, under which dedicated modules and other knowledge products will be developed.

64. This joint programme contributes to enabling a better understanding of the synergies and existing linkages between the Rio conventions and how they contribute to the implementation of the SDGs and the development of capacities for synergistic implementation at the national level.

65. Another strategic area of focus is tracking progress and identifying and reporting opportunities to better articulate and streamline the different processes among the three Rio conventions, as well as further elaboration of how they can contribute to monitoring the overall implementation of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the SDGs. Reporting has been largely siloed, with little coordination between the reporting processes of the three Rio conventions and under the SDGs umbrella.

66. Two joint side events, both entitled “Building capacities for synergistic implementation of the three Rio conventions”, were organized on the margins of Climate Week for Latin America and the Caribbean (Panama, 27 October 2023) and at UNFCCC COP 28 (Dubai, 11 December 2023).

67. Work currently underway includes: a desk review to identify good practices and lessons learned on building synergies; a global survey to assess the capacity needs and existing good practices for enhancing synergies; the development of a training package for self-paced learning on synergies; and the development of a web portal for the joint capacity-building programme.

68. The ongoing programme includes the organization of webinars on the effective, integrated and synergistic implementation of the Rio conventions; accessing and mobilizing finance for synergistic projects; and enhancing the role of local and Indigenous knowledge in supporting synergies in the implementation of the three conventions. The programme was presented at the 60th session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Science and Technological Advice (SBSTA) in Bonn (3–13 June 2024) through a side event and a test training session for focal points. Additional activities will be organized during the COPs of the three Rio conventions in 2024.

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<sup>21</sup> See document: [ICCD/COP\(16\)/4](#).

## V. Innovations for furthering cost-effective capacity-building

### Development and promotion of innovative pathways to facilitate capacity-building

69. To further enhance the secretariat's capacity-building efforts, there is potential for innovation in capacity development as it offers new ways of enhancing learning, collaboration and impact. Advances in digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, can personalize training, making it more accessible and relevant to diverse audiences. Virtual collaboration tools and an innovation hub will enable real-time knowledge sharing and global networking while innovative partnerships can bring fresh perspectives and resources.

70. By leveraging these innovations, capacity development can become more adaptive, efficient, and capable of addressing land degradation and drought. During the future restructuring of the capacity-building process, innovation should be prioritized.

## VI. Conclusions and recommendations

71. The Convention institutions have done extensive work with the aim of increasing their efforts to facilitate capacity-building on multiple topics using innovative approaches. The conclusions and recommendations below are part of renewed efforts to mainstream capacity-building across the convention institutions and any other attendant initiatives while emphasizing innovative approaches to help make access to capacity-building easier for Parties and practitioners. Accordingly, the COP may wish to consider the following conclusions and recommendations:

(a) Capacity-building activities implemented by Convention institutions cover a vast array of topics and UNCCD Party needs. They will continue to evolve, therefore there is a need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of capacity-building activities to assess their effectiveness, identify gaps, and ensure that programmes meet the needs of stakeholders;

(b) Capacity-building and innovation are crucial elements spanning the secretariat, the GM and related initiatives to ensure effective programme or project implementation. However, the current approach to undertaking capacity-building and innovation activities does not leverage nor fully maximize liaison with the Capacity Building and Innovation sub-programme, which is the structural mechanism intended to serve as the clearing house to centrally coordinate, integrate, and streamline all capacity-building and innovation-related efforts. To enable Parties to fully benefit from all the different opportunities presented either online or in person, the secretariat, the GM and all related initiatives would need to make additional efforts to harmonize capacity-building activities and make public all efforts undertaken, emphasizing innovative approaches as a key ingredient for successful outcomes;

(c) Despite its obvious drawbacks, the COVID-19 pandemic enabled Parties to engage in online training and e-learning opportunities which have become an important element of capacity-building, enabling a wider dissemination of information and knowledge. These efforts would need to be further expanded and supported, if possible, in all United Nations languages, provided that financial resources or alternative solutions are available. Such tools enable not only NFPs but also relevant CSOs, universities and other stakeholders to access expertise and essential knowledge for implementing LDN and other relevant activities in a coherent and inclusive manner;

(d) A hybrid approach blending both in-person and online training should be pursued by the secretariat and the GM to support the capacity development of Parties throughout the 2026 reporting process. E-learning video tutorials and online support by technical experts should be complemented by in person capacity-building through regional workshops. Such workshops should be collaborated with, and coordinated among multidisciplinary teams, including suitable regional/subregional experts,

providers and producers of default data and tools, and secretariat staff. Joint capacity-building efforts with other relevant initiatives such as the G20-GLI, International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA), and Peace Forest Initiative should be pursued;

(e) Parties and UNCCD stakeholders interested in enhancing land degradation mapping and LDN decision support capacities should become involved in the learning and exchange activities offered through the GEF MSP. SLM programmes and projects implemented by different agencies should work in alignment with the above processes to maximize learning and mutually strengthen the PRAIS reporting process through enhanced institutional capacities at national level;

(f) The capacity-building efforts during the 2022 UNCCD reporting process are commendable. The adaptive and innovative shift to online courses, expert training sessions, publications, regional workshops, and help desk services offered to Parties during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the commitment to managing the complexities of national reporting despite restrictions on in-person gatherings. Looking ahead to the 2026 national reporting process, the planned hybrid approach promises to build on these successes by incorporating both in-person and virtual training to ensure comprehensive support for Parties;

(g) Significant capacity-building results have been achieved to support the gender-responsive and transformative implementation of the Convention at both national and Convention institution level. Implementing capacity-building as a cross-cutting function requires clearly assigned functions, staffing, resources and protocols across the UNCCD. Further efforts are needed to better integrate this into the Convention institutions;

(h) The on-demand media training activities for journalists are efficient and effective and should be continued, upscaled and rolled out across the geographical scope of the Convention;

(i) The work accomplished on SDS is a welcome development. Concerned Parties and other interested stakeholders should be encouraged to make full use of these tools. The secretariat should continue its cooperation with concerned Parties, organizations and other relevant stakeholders with a view to developing additional tools and furthering capacity-building in this regard;

(j) Partnerships are essential to the capacity-building and development process and should be given priority to enable expansion in synergies with project and programme implementation across the Rio conventions at all levels;

(k) Youth should be incentivized to engage in formal training and DLDD-related professions while the representation of women in DLDD should be increased at a professional level. The UNCCD should move towards a formalized and remunerated apprenticeship programme, subject to the availability of funding, and an early and mid-career fellowship programme targeted at young people, especially women, from the most vulnerable communities;

(l) Capacity-building and development initiatives remain central to the effective implementation of the Convention. During the 2025–2026 biennium, further investments should be made in the re-conceptualization, redesign and development of capacity-building approaches and strategies, including the resuscitation of the CBM;

(m) During the 2025–2026 biennium, the secretariat should pursue efforts towards an innovation-driven UNCCD to keep abreast of technological advances in the digital world and the impact of artificial intelligence;

72. Parties may wish to consider these conclusions when engaging in consultations on a draft decision to be considered by the COP based on the draft text for negotiations that can be found in document [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8/Add.1](#), which, following [decision 33/COP.15](#), contains all draft decisions prepared for Parties for consideration at the twenty-second session of the CRIC.