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Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 8/COP.15, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat and appropriate Convention bodies and institutions to: (i) continue to enhance existing and seek new partnerships that enhance the implementation of the Convention, address desertification/land degradation and drought, and help achieve voluntary national land degradation neutrality targets; (ii) continue to strengthen collaboration with relevant United Nations entities and other partners to provide practical tools, technical guidance and capacity-building; and (iii) develop, in partnership with relevant organizations and networks, stakeholder engagement plans.

The COP also requested both the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to continue to fulfil their respective roles in the established partnerships.



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I. Background

1. Decision 8/COP.15 invites Parties to explore complementarities within relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), within their respective mandates and goals, in the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) at the national level, including, as appropriate, in the implementation of sustainable land management (SLM), ecosystem-based approaches or nature-based solutions.
2. The same decision also calls for the secretariat to continue to enhance existing and seek new partnerships that enhance the implementation of the Convention, address desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), and help achieve voluntary national land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets.
3. Further, the decision calls on the secretariat to continue to strengthen collaboration with relevant United Nations entities and other partners to provide practical tools, technical guidance and capacity-building, and to develop, in partnership with relevant organizations and networks, stakeholder engagement plans, including awareness-raising strategies, for youth, civil society organizations (CSOs), the media and the private sector.
4. The decision also recognizes the complementarities between LDN targets, nationally determined contributions (NDCs), and national biodiversity strategies and action plans, as well as national targets under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, and related planning, programming, reporting and monitoring in order to achieve the Convention’s objectives, and, inter alia, invites Parties to engage at the national level to explore complementarities in the implementation of and reporting on the three Rio conventions.
5. Further, the Intergovernmental Working Group to Oversee the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework Midterm Evaluation Process (IWG-MTE) provided a number of recommendations related to improving the synergies between the Rio conventions.¹ The report of the working group emphasized that effective synergies require concrete national coordination tools and global cooperation.
6. In 2023 and 2024, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) strengthened their collaboration with other conventions, international organizations, institutions and agencies. The secretariat and the GM developed an updated Partnership Strategy, and contributed, among other things, to the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, the United Nations Environment Management Group (EMG) and the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms (SDS Coalition). Further, the secretariat contributed to and supported the establishment of the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA).
7. This note provides a summary of a select number of such activities and highlights their efficacy in promoting and strengthening these relationships, as well as enhancing the implementation of the Convention.

II. Partnership engagement

8. In recognition of the growing importance of partnerships to deliver on the Convention’s mandate, in 2024, the UNCCD secretariat developed an updated partnership strategy to align collaborations across the secretariat, the GM and hosted initiatives.
9. In comparison to the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12), nearly twice the number decisions at the fifteenth session (COP 15) called on the secretariat to establish and work in partnerships, including on scientific cooperation, national reporting, media engagement, capacity-building, financial resources, land tenure, gender, and knowledge management. By mid-2024, the secretariat and the GM had been engaged in 450 formal memorandums of understanding, including 40 signed since COP 15.

¹ See document [ICCD/COP\(16\)/2](#).

10. The updated partnership strategy harmonizes the process of partnerships within the secretariat, the GM and its hosted initiatives, including the Group of 20 Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and Enhancing Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats (G20 Global Land Initiative) and IDRA, by agreeing on the same terms, processes and monitoring tools to ultimately channel a unified process for effectively establishing and leading partnerships.

11. Further, in response to requests by Parties in COP 15 decisions, the GM has successfully transitioned from a linear business model to a networked or platform business model across its workstreams incrementally and adaptively. For more detailed information on the GM business model, please refer to document ICCD/CRIC(22)/5.

12. In 2023 and 2024, strategic partnerships have been established and strengthened with the academic sector, CSOs, the media, the private sector, financial institutions, as well as United Nations entities and international organizations. In the lead up to COP 16, these partnerships were leveraged for the organization of the various thematic days, along the lines of the COP 16 Action Agenda. Detailed information on these partnerships is contained in documents ICCD/COP(16)/3, ICCD/COP(16)/12 and ICCD/COP(16)/13.

13. In order to assist Parties in using data-driven tools for reporting and informed decision-making, the secretariat has continued to build data-driven partnerships under the auspices of the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality Flagship initiative. Additional information on data-centered partnerships is contained in document ICCD/CRIC(22)/7–ICCD/COP(16)/CST/8.

A. Rio conventions and multilateral environmental agreements

14. Decision 8/COP.15 acknowledges that the implementation of the Convention benefits from strong and effective collaborations to leverage synergies with relevant organizations and international instruments including, inter alia, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Post–2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the G20 Global Land Initiative, the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030 and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Paris Agreement.

15. Further, the IWG-MTE recognized that synergies between the Rio conventions are implemented both at the national and global levels. As noted by the IWG-MTE, the interlinkages between the three Rio conventions addressing land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss are becoming increasingly recognized, particularly in relation to terrestrial ecosystem restoration and SLM, which represent the main intersections between the conventions.

16. From 2022 to 2024, the secretariat continued its engagement with the fellow Rio conventions, undertaking joint capacity-building and outreach activities, including joint events at CBD and UNFCCC meetings. As part of its ongoing engagement with the other Rio convention secretariats, the UNCCD secretariat also highlighted the linkages between climate, biodiversity and land during key moments. For the first time, UNCCD co-hosted a Land and Drought Pavilion at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 28) in 2023, with over 50 events focusing on the importance of healthy land as a climate solution.

17. Ahead of the three Conferences of the Parties (COPs) of the Rio conventions in 2024, the three Executive Secretaries met in Bonn to coordinate common efforts and reiterate the message for greater synergies between the three Rio conventions. In addition, special ministerial regional preparatory meetings would be held in Africa and the Latin America and the Caribbean regions with the participation of the three secretariats.

18. The Sherpas of the three Rio conventions have engaged with the EMG, whose membership consists of more than 50 specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations, including the secretariats of the MEAs, to explore a possible contribution by the EMG to enhancing synergies among these conventions. As part of this engagement, the EMG is organizing high-level dialogues at each of the three Rio convention COPs in 2024.

19. For the first time, the Presidencies of the three Rio convention COPs (China, Côte d'Ivoire and Egypt) issued a joint statement in November 2023 ahead of UNFCCC COP 28 in which they called for a coordinated approach both at international and national levels to tackle these issues in a holistic way, and urged greater cooperation between the three COPs and their secretariats.

20. Further, the UNFCCC COP 28 and UNFCCC COP 30 Presidencies, the CBD COP 15 and CBD COP 16 Presidencies, the UNCCD COP 15 Presidency, and chairs of diverse partnerships, initiatives and coalitions affirmed, in a joint statement published in June 2024, that there is no path to fully achieving the near-term and long-term goals of the Paris Agreement or the 2030 goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) without urgently addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation together in a coherent, synergetic and holistic manner, in accordance with the best available science.²

21. Inaugurated in Nagoya, Japan, at the CBD COP 10 in 2010, the Rio Conventions Pavilion is a collaborative platform that promotes synergies among the Rio conventions at the implementation level and showcases activities that link biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, SLM and efforts to combat desertification, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

22. The Rio Conventions Pavilion was organized at key events during 2022 to highlight the importance of tackling biodiversity loss, climate change and land degradation together rather than in a siloed manner. These included: UNCCD COP 15 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, the Stockholm+50 conference in Sweden, UNFCCC COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, and CBD COP 15 Part II in Montreal, Canada.

23. A dedicated Rio Conventions Journey page on the Rio Conventions Pavilion website³ that highlights relevant events across different COP venues was introduced at UNFCCC COP 28. This approach proved more cost-effective compared to the stand-alone Rio Conventions Pavilion at climate COPs. Plans for 2024 include the Rio Conventions Journey presence at CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD COPs.

Cooperation with other multilateral environmental agreements

24. During the reporting period, the UNCCD actively engaged with several MEAs, including the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).

25. The secretariat has been an active participant in the Bern III Conference on Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions for the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal GBF hosted by the Government of Switzerland in January 2024, which focused on the efficient and effective implementation of the GBF by identifying opportunities to drive and coordinate an inclusive collaborative approach towards implementation of the framework while respecting the respective mandates of biodiversity-related conventions and other relevant MEAs and relevant United Nations entities.

26. In February 2024, the UNCCD Executive Secretary moderated a high-level dialogue during the first-ever Multilateral Environmental Agreements Day at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). In his remarks, he underscored UNEA's critical role in harmonizing the work and focus of the various MEAs in facing a multitude of interconnected crises and called for aligning LDN targets with NDCs and the new biodiversity targets for 2030.

27. On the occasion of the fourteenth session of the COP to the CMS, held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in February 2024, UNCCD joined the newly established Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity alongside the Centre for Large Landscape Conservation, the CBD, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, International Union for Conservation of

² See: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/other/cop28-joint-statement-climate-nature-and-people>.

³ See: <http://www.riopavilion.org/>.

Nature (IUCN), the Ramsar Convention, the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the World Wide Fund For Nature.

28. As part of its support to IDRA, the secretariat engaged with the Water Convention during UNFCCC COP 28 and will be attending the tenth session of the Water Convention's Meeting of the Parties in October 2024 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

29. Further, the secretariat and the G20 Global Land Initiative collaborated with the Ramsar Convention on several initiatives, including "Her Land. Her Rights." campaign and land restoration flagships.

B. United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030)

30. In March 2019, through its resolution A/RES/73/284, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared 2021–2030 as the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, stressing "the need to step up efforts to tackle desertification, land degradation, erosion and drought" and "the need for cooperation, coordination and synergies in the work related to ecosystem restoration among relevant United Nations entities, according to their mandate".

31. The United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) lead the implementation of the Decade, in collaboration with the secretariats of the Rio conventions, and other relevant MEAs and entities of the United Nations system. The UNCCD secretariat is involved through regular coordination meetings organized by the Decade's Coordination Group.

32. The Decade is organized by Task Forces, including one on Best Practices (led by FAO), Finance (led by the World Bank), Monitoring (led by FAO), Science (led by IUCN), and Youth (self-organized).

33. The UNCCD secretariat participates actively in the Task Forces on Monitoring and Best Practices through the FAO-led Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring (FERM).

34. In the Task Forces on Monitoring, the UNCCD secretariat advocated for the use of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 15.3.1 (Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area) as a proxy of terrestrial ecosystem degradation for tracking progress towards Target 2 of the GBF, which aims to restore 30 per cent of all degraded ecosystems. As a result, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the CBD, at its twenty-sixth session, recommended the endorsement of SDG indicator 15.3.1 as a component indicator under Target 2. This recommendation paves the way for enhanced synergies in reporting between the UNCCD and the CBD. Concrete actions have been identified to enable synergistic reporting on areas under restoration. These include defining steps towards data interoperability between the UNCCD's performance review and assessment of implementation system and the FAO's FERM, as the official monitoring platform for tracking global progress under the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030). For additional information, refer to document ICCD/CRIC(22)/7–ICCD/COP(16)/CST/8.

35. Through its partnership with the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies, the UNCCD provided a substantive contribution of good practices in sustainable land management to the FERM platform.⁴ For additional information, refer to document ICCD/COP(16)/CST/5.

36. Furthermore, the Great Green Wall Initiative, supported by the GM, has been selected as one of the World Restoration Flagships, while the G20 Global Land Initiative has become the lead agency in the Land Restoration Challenge.

⁴ See: <https://ferm.fao.org/search/good-practices>.

C. United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms 2025–2034

37. The secretariat continued its collaborations with the SDS Coalition and its member organizations, including FAO, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the World Meteorological Organization. The secretariat has been actively engaged with institutions, governments, other technical partners and regional entities on sand and dust storms (SDS) issues, including pilot projects to develop national and regional SDS impact mitigation strategies. In July 2024, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution proclaiming 2025–2034 as the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms. The secretariat stands ready to support this new Decade as part of the SDS Coalition. For additional information, refer to document ICCD/COP(16)/16.

D. Hosted initiatives

1. G20 Global Land Initiative

38. During the Saudi Arabian Presidency in 2020, G20 leaders launched the G20 Global Land Initiative with one ambition: a 50 per cent reduction in degraded land by 2040, on a voluntary basis. The implementation of the G20 Global Land Initiative is a collective responsibility of all the G20 members. The Initiative Coordination Office (ICO) was established in order to support and facilitate its implementation. The ICO receives administrative and financial oversight from the UNCCD secretariat as part of a formalized collaboration agreement.

39. The G20 Global Land Initiative has the following three objectives:

- (a) Conserving land and halting habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and land degradation;
- (b) Promoting integrated, sustainable and resilient land and landscape management through nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches;
- (c) Restoring degraded land through, inter alia, SLM.

40. The G20 Global Land Initiative implementation strategy is built on four pillars of action:

- (a) Sharing and showcasing best practices;
- (b) Working with the private sector to create business opportunities from land restoration;
- (c) Working with civil society to advocate for land restoration; and
- (d) Building capacities of key stakeholders.

41. In 2022, the Indonesia Presidency of the G20 chose peatland and mangrove restoration as the priority action areas for land restoration. The India Presidency kept the G20 goal of preventing, halting and reversing land degradation on the G20 agenda in 2023, focusing on areas affected by mining as well as forest fires. A number of side events were organized on these topics, and two compendia of best practices were prepared during the Presidency, with ICO supporting and working closely with the India Presidency. The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration issued in September 2023 reiterates the commitment to a 50 per cent reduction in degraded land by 2040.

42. Furthermore, the ICO also supported the Brazil Presidency in 2024 with their selected environmental sector priorities: payments for ecosystem services, ocean management and waste management. In particular, the ICO participated in the working group that discussed payments for ecosystem services and presented how the possibility of leveraging the payment could be used for land restoration and vice versa, and how land restoration could be used to enhance the payment.

43. The G20 Global Land Initiative Steering Committee met four times; in November 2022, July 2023, November 2023 and July 2024. The Committee agreed to initiate a number of foundational studies to understand the current landscape of restoration and prepare a

blueprint for the restoration initiative. Additional information about G20 Global Land Initiative is contained on the G20 Global Land Initiative website⁵ and in the G20 Global Land Initiative Implementation Strategy.⁶

2. International Drought Resilience Alliance

44. At the initiative of the Presidents of Senegal and Spain, leaders from over 25 countries and 20 organizations launched the IDRA at UNFCCC COP 27 in November 2022. IDRA aims to accelerate action and help countries to be better prepared for future droughts.

45. As a collaborative platform, IDRA is the first global coalition generating political momentum and mobilizing financial and technical resources to support countries, cities and communities to combat drought proactively and enhance drought resilience. The Alliance promotes effective and efficient preparedness and adaptation measures that go beyond disaster response to reduce vulnerability to drought through the adoption of a proactive approach.

46. The IDRA secretariat is hosted by the UNCCD secretariat, and the first Steering Committee Meeting was convened in March 2023 on the margins of the United Nations Water Conference.

47. As of August 2024, the IDRA had expanded to include more than 60 countries and organizations, including intergovernmental entities, multilateral development banks, financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, CSOs and the private sector.

48. Since its creation, and in line with its four pillars of action, the IDRA:

(a) Has been continuously mobilizing political support to prioritize drought resilience as a critical component of national development and cooperation policies. This has been done through various high-level meetings aimed at strengthening the institutional architecture supporting the international community in catalysing accelerated action for drought resilience and the achievement of the SDGs;

(b) Is currently working on developing a comprehensive list of typologies of investments for drought resilience, covering various aspects of drought resilience, including soft investments such as generation of data, early warning systems, risk assessment and management, capacity-building, and community engagement, as well as other sectorial investments in different sectors, such as agriculture, water, infrastructure, and/or nature-based solutions, etc. By providing a shared understanding, the IDRA Common Framework seeks to promote harmonized and aligned interventions under flagship initiatives;

(c) Is promoting knowledge-sharing to enhance the collective understanding of drought resilience and facilitate the adoption of innovative approaches. Several publications are currently in preparation, aiming to generate more information on the interest of adopting a proactive stance on drought resilience. In addition, IDRA is currently developing an International Drought Resilience Observatory that will provide a comprehensive framework for assessing, monitoring and optimizing drought resilience, offering windows of opportunities to countries to showcase successful stories and share knowledge through examples of drought adaptation, thereby deepening our understanding of drought resilience dynamics and facilitating informed decision-making;

(d) Is developing new and innovative financial tools tailored to local needs and circumstances and aimed at supporting drought resilience investments, involving a blend of public and private finance. Additional information about IDRA is contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/3 and on the IDRA website.

3. Changwon Initiative

49. The secretariat continued its various collaborations in the implementation of the Changwon Initiative launched at COP 10, which has inspired and catalysed the incorporation of the global “a land degradation neutral-world” target in the SDG. Since then, the Changwon

⁵ See: <https://g20land.org>.

⁶ See: <https://g20land.org/implementation-strategy/>.

Initiative has supported the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme, which helps countries set their voluntary national LDN targets and define measures for achieving them. To date, some 130 countries have joined the programme and more than 100 of those have already committed themselves to not degrade more land than they restore.

50. In 2023, the secretariat renewed its cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Korea on the Changwon Initiative, which will focus on enhancing the scientific process to support the Convention's implementation, promoting partnerships at all levels to improve livelihoods of affected populations, addressing subregional and regional challenges through land restoration and reforestation, and promoting synergies with other relevant conventions and international organizations. For additional information, refer to document ICCD/CRIC(22)/5.

4. Peace Forest Initiative

51. The Peace Forest Initiative (PFI) promotes transboundary cooperation on land restoration in fragile and conflict-affected locations. With the generous support of the Republic of Korea, the GM will provide countries with technical support and seed funding to plan and mobilize resources for large-scale restoration and peace-building activities based on the PFI principles. The GM recently completed an initial mapping of potential PFI sites and identified 17 locations involving 44 countries for the PFI activities. Additional information about the PFI activities is contained in document ICCD/CRIC(22)/5.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

52. When considering the next steps for promoting and strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies, priority should be given to engaging with Parties, secretariats and other key stakeholders on measures to effectively support synergies among the Rio conventions at the national and global levels. This may include (i) joint guidance for enhancing national coordination; (ii) information on interlinked provisions and tasks under different conventions; (iii) the promotion of sharing data collected under each convention; (iv) joint science-policy publications, shared databases or repositories on case studies and lessons learned from projects and programmes that link the objectives of the three Rio conventions; (v) interoperability of information management systems; and (vi) workshops and awareness-raising efforts on synergies.

53. It is important to continue to strengthen existing collaboration with other relevant conventions, institutions and agencies and develop new partnerships with key stakeholders in line with the updated partnership strategy. As noted by the IWG-MTE, the COP may request the secretariat, including its regional officers, to enhance outreach to different stakeholder groups that are active and influential in matters concerning land and drought, with a view to progressively involving these groups in UNCCD implementation. In doing so, the Convention can leverage the respective memberships and networks of hosted initiatives, such as the G20 Global Land Initiative and IDRA.

54. As the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030 enters its second half, it is critical to step up efforts to tackle DLDD and clearly articulate the benefits of land restoration. For this, continued engagement in the Land Restoration Challenge as well as working with partners on scientific and technical guidance, monitoring and reporting, awareness-raising and advocacy will be important. The lessons learned from the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030 will also be instrumental in defining the Convention's contribution to the upcoming United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms 2025–2034.

55. In order to strengthen partnerships and promote new ones that are conducive to a more efficient and effective implementation of the objectives of the Convention, Parties may wish to consider these conclusions when engaging in consultations on a draft decision to be considered by the COP contained in document ICCD/COP(16)/22.