



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification



UNCCD
COP17
ULAANBAATAR 2026

Water Day Programme

25 AUG
2026



Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Water Day at a glance

Water is at the core of land health, ecosystem stability, climate resilience, and human well-being. Yet freshwater systems are under increasing stress due to accelerating land degradation, drought, climate change, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable land and water management practices. Within the mandate of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), water is increasingly recognized as a critical entry point for strengthening drought resilience, restoring degraded lands, mitigating the impacts of Sand and Dust Storms (SDS), and advancing Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).

The land–water nexus is central to these challenges. Healthy soils and functioning landscapes regulate hydrological cycles by enhancing water infiltration, groundwater recharge, moisture retention, and vegetation cover, while degraded lands reduce water storage capacity, increase runoff and erosion, and intensify drought conditions.

In turn, **water scarcity and unsustainable water use further accelerate land degradation and desertification processes, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of ecological and socio-economic vulnerability.** These interconnected pressures also contribute to the frequency and severity of SDS events, as degraded, dry, and unvegetated soils become major sources of wind erosion and airborne dust. SDS not only degrade soil productivity and water quality, but also threaten human health, food systems, infrastructure, livelihoods, and regional stability, with impacts often extending far beyond their source areas.

Water insecurity is deeply intertwined with broader socio-economic challenges, including food insecurity, displacement and human mobility, reduced access to education, particularly in drought-affected communities, and increased risks to stability and security. Addressing these interconnected crises therefore requires integrated land and water management approaches that simultaneously strengthen ecosystem resilience, reduce SDS risks, and support sustainable development outcomes.

Within the context of COP17, **Water Day aims to strengthen the drought and SDS agenda by promoting integrated land and water approaches and reinforcing the land–water nexus as a foundation for resilience.** Water Day will showcase solutions that improve water retention in landscapes, restore soil and vegetation cover, reduce erosion and dust emissions, enhance drought resilience, and promote sustainable and inclusive land and water governance.





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Water Day High-Level Events

High-Level Opening of Water Day

9:00 – 10:00 [Plenary]

Water Day will open by framing drought as a systemic global risk that demands stronger political commitment and integrated land–water action.

High-level Ministerial Dialogue on Drought Resilience

10:00 – 13:00 [Plenary]

The Ministerial Dialogue on Drought Resilience will convene ministers and senior government representatives to exchange experiences, identify priorities, provide political and technical guidance, promote collaboration, explore resource mobilization opportunities for drought resilience action. The dialogue will also help shape a common global vision, strengthen leadership, and support ambitious outcomes for COP17 and beyond.

Official Launch of the Drought Resilience Investment Facility (DRIF): Accelerating Finance for Drought Resilience, Water Security and Land Restoration

11:30 – 13:00 [Action Dome]

This high-level session will convene ministers, multilateral development banks, development finance institutions, institutional investors, philanthropic organizations, insurers, and private sector leaders to accelerate financing solutions for drought resilience and integrated land–water restoration. The session will address the growing global drought finance gap and explore how innovative financing mechanisms, blended finance structures, insurance solutions, and catalytic public-private partnerships can unlock large-scale investment for resilient landscapes, water security, and sustainable dryland economies.

Water Forward: Investing on droughts at scale

11:30 – 13:00 [MET 22]

This session will draw in more countries, partner organizations, and private sector investors to support implementing Scalable Solution 6 of the Water Forward agenda to achieve the Water Forward goal of achieving 400 million people with water security by 2030.

Launch of Report on the Upside Potential of Governance Reform To Improve Drought Resilience and Tools For Making It Happen

11:30 – 13:00 [MET 23]

On this session, the report's recommendations and conclusions will be surfaced and critiqued to improve their impact and scalability. Parliamentarians and other government officials willing to act, funding sources, and target countries for initial reform initiatives will be identified. Next steps to achieve drought governance reforms will be discussed.

Transforming Agricultural Water Management for Drought Resilience and Food Security

11:30 – 13:00 [MET 24]

The event will demonstrate how improved agricultural water management can safeguard food systems under increasing drought pressure. The event will showcase stakeholder's leadership in advancing water-efficient, drought-resilient, and sustainable food systems and will catalyse cross-convention collaboration and investment to integrate water and food security objectives in national and regional policies.



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Water as a Connector: Building Momentum from UNCCD COP17 to the UN 2026 Water Conference

11:30 – 13:00 [MET 21]

This session will convene political leaders, UN principals, financing partners, and international stakeholders to demonstrate how water is a strategic connector across the Rio Conventions, accelerating action on climate adaptation, resilience to water extremes, land restoration, biodiversity protection, food security, gender equality, sustainable development, and improved access to safe water and sanitation.

Official Launch of International Drought Resilience Observatory (Phase II) -Ribbon-cutting ceremony

13:00 – 14:00 [Action Dome]

The International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA) will mark a key milestone at the UNCCD COP17 with the official launch of the fully operational International Drought Resilience Observatory (IDRO), inaugurated through a ribbon-cutting ceremony building on the momentum of COP16 in Riyadh.

Scaling the Great Green Wall through Continental Integration and the AUGGWI Strategy (2024–2034)

14:00– 16:00 [Action Dome]

The session will focus on showcasing delivery at scale by highlighting concrete results and lessons from the Sahel and the emerging SADC GGW investment program under the continental framework. The event will also mobilize finance and partnerships and will strengthen policy and financing coherence by positioning the GGW as Africa's principal platform for nature-based solutions, climate adaptation, ecosystem restoration, and green jobs.

From Victoria Falls to Ulaanbaatar: Wetlands as the heart of integrated land and water resilience

14:00– 15:30 [MET 22]

By positioning wetlands as a connecting thread across water, biodiversity, land and climate governance, this event will support greater alignment across multilateral environmental agreements, foster synergistic implementation at the national level, and promote integrated strategies for resilience of the hydrological cycle as a contribution to the UN Water Conference in December 2026 in the United Arab Emirates.

Preventing Water Bankruptcy: Cities, Utilities and Catchments on the Frontline of Drought Resilience

14:00– 15:30 [MET 23]

This event brings together local governments, water and sanitation operators, basin organisations and development partners to examine how coordinated action can prevent and manage water bankruptcy. Practical pathways will be explored for city–utility–basin cooperation, peer learning through Water Operators' Partnerships, drought preparedness, nature-based and catchment-scale solutions, non-revenue water reduction, and investment readiness.

First Assembly of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership (RGDRP)

15:00– 16:30 [MET 24]

The Assembly will focus on accelerating implementation through integrated and proactive drought management approaches, with discussions centered on preparedness, resilience-building, financing, and partnership development.



Special High-Level Event on Sand and Dust Storms (SDS)

16:15– 18:00 [Action
Dome]

The session will focus on addressing financing needs for SDS impact mitigation in alignment with the UNCCD objectives highlighting regional cooperation. The session will contribute to promote consensus and consolidate commitments on SDS initiatives.

Land Restoration for Water Resilience

16:00– 17:30 [MET 22]

This event will highlight the critical role of wetlands as natural water infrastructure and integrated approaches for ecosystem restoration and water security. The event will draw lessons from emerging initiatives advancing proactive drought risk management, preparedness, and resilience-building through science-based solutions, partnerships, and investment mobilisation.

Dialogue on Water- LandPeople: Connecting science, policy and practice

16:00– 17:30 [MET 23]

This dialogue focuses on science-driven and people-centred approaches to integrated water, ecosystem and land management. It aims to promote innovative solutions and sustainable practices at the intersection of science-policy-practice that manage and restore water resources and ecosystems in an integrated manner, while supporting biodiversity, preserving landscapes of exceptional ecological and cultural values, sustaining livelihood.

UNCCD's Holistic Approach to Drought Management

16:30– 18:00 [MET 24]

This event will showcase UNCCD's holistic, end-to-end approach to drought resilience through the different initiatives, tools and partnerships for drought management, from policy and planning to knowledge, finance, and market mechanisms.

Managing water related disasters and risks for resilient future

16:30– 18:00 [MET 21]

The event will demonstrate how risk-informed planning, nature-based solutions, and integrated land–water–ecosystem approaches can strengthen resilience, enhance water and food security, and support investment-ready adaptation and development solutions.

IDRA Plenary

18:00– 19:00 [Action Dome]

The IDRA Secretariat will convene members through a biennial Plenary Meeting. This event provides a unique opportunity for members to reflect on progress achieved, exchange experiences and lessons learned. Bringing together governments, international organizations, development partners, research institutions, and other stakeholders, the meeting will reinforce IDRA's role as a global platform for collaboration on drought resilience.

Time table

Time	Plenary/Main Committee	Action Dome	MET22 (U-shape – 120 pax)	MET23 (Classroom 100 pax)	MET24 (U-shape – 120 pax)	MET21 (Classroom 160 pax)
8-8:30	Welcome					
8:30-9						
9-9:30	High Level opening					
9:30-10						
10-10:30	Ministerial Dialogue on Drought Resilience					
10:30-11						
11-11:30						
11:30-12		Official Launch of the Drought Resilience Investment Facility (DRIF): Accelerating Finance for Drought Resilience, Water Security and Land Restoration	Water Forward: investing on droughts at scale	Launch of Report on the Upside Potential of Governance Reform to Improve Drought Resilience and Tools For Making It Happen	Transforming Agricultural Water Management for Drought Resilience and Food Security	Water as a Connector: Building Momentum from UNCCD COP17 to the UN 2026 Water Conference
12-12:30						
12:30-13						
13-13:30		Official Launch of International Drought Resilience Observatory (Phase II) - Ribbon-cutting ceremony				
13:30-14						
14-14:30		Scaling the Great Green Wall through continental integration and the AUGGWI Strategy (with AU, AfDB)	From Victoria Falls to Ulaanbaatar: Wetlands as the heart of integrated land and water resilience	Preventing Water Bankruptcy: Cities, Utilities and Catchments on the Frontline of Drought Resilience		
14:30-15						
15-15:30	COW				First Assembly of the RGDRP	
15:30-16						
16-16:30		Special High-Level Event on Sand and Dust Storms (SDS) (Starts at 16:15)	Land restoration for water resilience	Dialogue on Water-Land-People: Connecting science, policy and practice	UNCCD's Holistic Approach to Drought Management	Managing water related disasters and risks for resilient future
16:30-17						
17-17:30						
17:30-18						
18-18:30		IDRA Plenary and Reception (closed session for IDRA members only)				
18:30-19						
19-19:30						
19:30-20						