



Conference of the Parties

Fifteenth session

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 9–20 May 2022

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

High-level opening ceremony

Note on the high-level opening ceremony of the Conference of the Parties at its fifteenth session.

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The special segment will be comprised of a high-level opening ceremony in the form of a Heads of States and Governments Summit on Monday 09 May 2022, and interactive dialogues and round-table discussions among ministers, high-ranking officials and other United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification stakeholders on Tuesday 10 May 2022.

- Interactive dialogue 1: Land reGeneration: The role of youth in shaping the sustainable land agenda
- Interactive dialogue 2: Future-proofing land use: Shifting patterns in production and consumption
- Round table 1: Rights, rewards and responsibilities: the future of land stewardship
- Round table 2: Land restoration: A path to sustainable post-pandemic recovery
- Round table 3: The Big Dry: From disaster to drought resilience

The high-level segment will draw attention to the diverse pathways for post-pandemic recovery which feature the important role of healthy and productive land in the achievement of sustainable development for all. It is anticipated that the high-level segment will generate strong political momentum to guide the deliberations of country Parties as well as increase the engagement of stakeholders in the implementation of the Convention.



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I. Background

1. The high-level segment of the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) will be held on 9–10 May 2022 in Abidjan, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. The high-level opening ceremony on 9 May 2022 will take the form of a Heads of States and Governments Summit organized by the host country with the support of the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
2. Building on the programme of work for COP 15, two interactive dialogues and three round-table discussions will be organized on 10 May 2022 with relevant stakeholders, including ministers and heads of delegation, international organizations, civil society organizations, the business community and private sector, and local government representatives.
3. To assist country delegations in preparing for the high-level segment, the secretariat has prepared this information note outlining some of the questions that ministers and other heads of delegation will be invited to consider during their deliberations.

II. Organization of the high-level segment

4. The Heads of States and Governments Summit will commence with an opening ceremony, followed by a presidential dialogue organized by the Ivorian Government under the auspices of His Excellency, Alassane Ouattara, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. The objective of the summit, building on previous high-level meetings on desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), aims to infuse political momentum into the deliberations of the Parties and advance drought preparedness and land restoration as essential commitments to accelerate progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3 and national voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets. During the presidential dialogue, Heads of State and Government are expected to:
 - (a) Share their leadership experience on land stewardship and reflect on the importance of protecting land resources (soil, water and biodiversity) through sustainable land management and restoration and as a means of promoting more inclusive and equitable socio-economic development, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - (b) Discuss the need for proactive policies and planning on drought in terms of enhancing the resilience of affected populations, developing and utilizing early warning systems, and financing to compensate losses incurred due to drought;
 - (c) Identify future opportunities to continue to raise political awareness at home and at the international level around the LDN Agenda to accelerate progress towards achieving multiple SDGs.
5. The host country is also expected to launch a Legacy Programme which is being prepared in close collaboration with its development partners. The programme will be an ambitious multi-partner initiative aimed at boosting long-term environmental sustainability across major commodity value chains while protecting and restoring forests and lands and improving communities' resilience to climate change. The Summit is also expected to issue the Abidjan Call, aimed at raising ambition for investments in large-scale land restoration projects and programmes which also help countries and communities prepare for and mitigate the impacts of drought which have now increased in frequency, scope and severity due to climate change.
6. The high-level interactive dialogues and round tables will be held on 10 May and draw attention to the diverse paths for post-pandemic recovery and the role of healthy productive land in the achievement of sustainable development for all. Two interactive dialogue sessions will be held consecutively in the morning, followed by three concurrent round table discussions in the afternoon. Each ministerial round-table discussion will last approximately 180 minutes. Ministers and heads of delegation are asked to inform the

secretariat in advance if they plan to participate and take the floor during a specific round table.

7. Each interactive dialogue and round-table discussion will be moderated by a Chair at either ministerial level or drawn from among high-level participants. The Chair will guide the deliberations and ensure the efficient use of time. Substantive deliberations will be opened by the Chair and complemented with inspiring inputs from keynote speakers or panellists. During the discussions, ministers are encouraged to engage directly and respond to the inputs. In addition to the interactive dialogue sessions and ministerial round tables, there will be the option to deliver formal statements in a separate room designated for that purpose. Registration for a slot to deliver a formal statement will be opened in-session and further information will be provided in the daily journal.

8. The topics for consideration during the sessions to be held on 10 May 2022 are as follows:

- (a) Interactive dialogue 1: Land reGeneration: The role of youth in shaping the sustainable land agenda;
- (b) Interactive dialogue 2: Future-proofing land use: Shifting patterns in production and consumption;
- (c) Round table 1: Rights, rewards and responsibilities: the future of land stewardship;
- (d) Round table 2: Land restoration: A path to sustainable post-pandemic recovery;
- (e) Round table 3: The Big Dry: From disaster to drought resilience.

III. Interactive dialogue 1: Land reGeneration: The role of youth in shaping the sustainable land agenda

A. Background

9. According to the United Nations World Population Prospects 2019, 56 per cent of the world's population is below the age of 35¹ while 41 per cent is below the age of 26. Young people are facing incredible challenges and even life-threatening risks due to environmental degradation which often disproportionately affects girls and young women. At the same time, and perhaps as a result of these prospects, young people have become increasingly vocal and influential actors in local and global movements demanding climate action, food justice and environmental and land stewardship, while advocating for corporate responsibility and more sustainable consumption and production.

10. In particular, decent job opportunities are a key issue for the growing numbers of young people around the world and yet decent employment and entrepreneurial opportunities remain limited for young people in rural areas in many parts of the world. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis has led to massive job losses. Youth and women were especially hard hit, with employment losses of 8.7 per cent and 5.0 per cent, respectively, in 2020, compared with 3.7 per cent for adults and 3.9 per cent for men.² Over 25.6 million young people aged 15–19 years will enter the labour market in the next 10 years. On the other hand, regenerative agriculture, eco-tourism and protected area management represent an opportunity to bring young people back to rural areas with the prospect of secure and stable livelihoods. Where and how world leaders are breaking new ground and creating opportunities for young people to start sustainable land-based jobs could lead to real change. At the same time, it will be important to open spaces for dialogue and youth advocacy at all levels, from the multilateral process to local politics, as a means of harnessing their energy, talent, creativity and interests.

¹ <<https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>>.

² <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/goal-08/>>.

11. This interactive dialogue will kick-start an intergenerational dialogue on the challenges and prospects for youth to help (re) activate the land restoration agenda.

B. Key question: How can we best harness the potential of youth in terms of meaningful engagement and participation in land restoration, ensure that their rights are respected and that they have access to training and capacity-building for the decent green jobs of the future?

12. The following questions could be considered:

(a) How can countries more fully engage and involve young people in decision-making at the local, national, regional and international levels?

(b) How can countries ensure the collective and meaningful participation of young people in the UNCCD process from the point of view of design, implementation, and monitoring of LDN and other land restoration activities?

(c) How can governments promote and encourage businesses to create decent employment and green jobs and put this at the centre of policymaking and urban and rural development strategies?

(d) What do youth need in order to generate entrepreneurial opportunities for themselves; what kind of incentives are they getting, and what are the best practices and lessons learnt?

IV. Interactive dialogue 2: Future-proofing land use: Shifting patterns in production and consumption

A. Background

13. The way we produce our food and the other goods we consume has changed significantly in the past few decades. Industrialized and globalized production systems have made those goods and food supplies appear plentiful and cheap across the globe, feeding and providing for millions. This, however, has come at a great cost with rates of land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change, driven by unsustainable production practices, now posing a severe threat to economic systems and whole societies. There is a pressing need to transform our production and consumption systems to make sure that they, and the ecosystems on which they rely, are resilient and future-proof.

14. This transformation cannot be viewed in isolation and instead needs to be understood in the context of global trends that are simultaneously influencing every aspect of how we live. Land degradation and climate change, population growth and demographic change, rapid urbanization and technological advances are global megatrends affecting people across the globe.

15. Collectively, we will be in a position to build resilience into our environmental, consumption and production systems if the evolution is based on a clear understanding of how future global megatrends will interact with each other, and how populations and the land itself will be affected. Developing this foresight and investing in the protection, sustainable management and restoration of land accordingly could help communities and Parties to the UNCCD to build a just and sustainable economic transition able to withstand the impacts of climate change while furthering human development.

16. Some points to consider:

(a) *Climate change and land degradation* – Together, climate change and land degradation are likely to have a significant impact on all regions globally. For example, Uzbekistan could potentially face a yield reduction of between 20 and 50 per cent for nearly all crops by 2050. The United States is likely to lose 40 per cent of its maize crop per year due to pests. In the Sahel, unprecedented impacts under both business-as-usual models and

slow emissions reduction models are expected to occur from 2030 onwards. Climate change and land degradation will be a major risk globally. Economic transformation that contributes to combatting these issues will be a key factor in ensuring that the human development gains achieved in the past decade are maintained. In terms of agricultural production, this may involve shifting what is grown, where it is grown and how it is grown so that food production becomes nature-positive.

(b) *Technology/4th Industrial Revolution* – Automation and digitalization will make production cheaper as less labour will be needed in many sectors. Transportation costs will therefore become more critical and could facilitate a process of on-shoring and near-shoring. This could create many new opportunities, especially in terms of localized food production and value addition in a distinct break with the globalized, industrialized agricultural value chains. However, this may also lead to unemployment in parts of the labour-intensive land-use sector.

(c) *Population changes & shifting economic powers* – The explosion of the middle classes in South-East Asia and the rise of megacities on the African continent are impacting consumption as these areas become increasingly important markets. In developing countries, the lowest income and low-income market segment in the food and beverage industry already accounts for USD 2.3 trillion annually with a strong tendency towards future growth.

17. The production and consumption patterns of the resilient economies and, by extension, the value chains of the future may have to take three important criteria into account.

(a) Contribution to a circular or regenerative bioeconomy.

(b) Contribution to the upward mobility/human development of the population.

(c) Survival prospects in view of climate change, biodiversity loss or land degradation over the short, medium and long term.

18. During this interactive dialogue, high level policy-makers and business executives will focus on the idea of future-proofing land use. This will highlight both the threat and opportunities faced globally by our productive capacities as a result of these megatrends. Participants will explore ways of ensuring that the shifting and evolving patterns of production and consumption do not further drive land degradation but instead benefit people and the planet.

B. Key question: What needs to happen to future proof land use?

19. The following questions could be considered:

(a) Are these megatrends already affecting your country and its economy?

(b) What are the main risks to commodities or other value chains in your country?

(c) Is food production secure?

(d) Have you considered how you will future-proof production and secure your productive assets (such as land and water)?

(e) Will land restoration be enough to help or will you have to change your crop production patterns entirely?

(f) Can consumers help?

(g) Do you see opportunities in these trends (technology, emerging middle class, urbanization) to support sustainable land use or land restoration?

(h) Is more foresight needed to understand the impact of these trends on productive capacity?

V. Round table 1: Rights, rewards, and responsibilities: the future of land stewardship

A. Background

20. The future of land stewardship relies on the responsible governance of tenure – affirming rights, offering rewards and assuming responsibilities. Land tenure defines the conditions under which land can be accessed, occupied, held or managed, by whom and for how long. When land tenure is responsibly governed, this can increase tenure security and create incentives for using and managing land resources in a more efficient, equitable and sustainable way. People with tenure security are guaranteed to reap rewards from the land and are hence more likely to invest in production improvements, choose sustainable crops and practices that enhance soil health and fertility, and adopt new technologies and innovations that regenerate natural capital. Secure land tenure can also provide the assurance needed to stimulate large-scale investments in land that deliver multiple benefits in terms of poverty reduction, food security, women’s empowerment, and avoiding resource conflicts.

21. In 2019, the 14th COP to the UNCCD adopted a landmark decision on land tenure (decision 26/COP.14). Through this decision, the Parties to the Convention recognized the importance of secure tenure both for addressing DLDD and improving human well-being and livelihoods. The pursuit of LDN cannot overlook the tenure rights of the people who rely on, care for and work the land. Secure access to healthy and productive land is essential for the millions of rural people who directly depend on land and land-based ecosystem services, particularly smallholder farmers, women, youth, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and local communities.

22. Secure land tenure is a significant enabler for land restoration and LDN initiatives. In the context of the UNCCD and its implementation, building on the internationally recognized principles of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, as adopted by the Committee on World Food Security of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, is essential to ensure that the proposed actions for achieving LDN and land restoration targets embrace appropriate practices that safeguard legitimate tenure rights for all, particularly the most vulnerable.

23. This round table will give high-level decision-makers the opportunity to reflect on the potential of secure land tenure to address DLDD and enhance the implementation of the Convention. Participants are encouraged to share their country experiences and express the ways and means that the UNCCD and its partners could assist countries in addressing the challenges in successfully integrating land tenure into LDN and land restoration initiatives.

B. Key Question: How to best implement responsible governance of tenure to create the right enabling environment for good land stewardship and to stimulate investments in land degradation neutrality and land restoration initiatives?

24. The following questions could be considered:

(a) Do you have examples, from the national or local level, where improved tenure security has incentivized investments in the long-term health and productivity of the land on a small and large scale?

(b) What forms of technical or financial assistance would be most valuable in addressing important land rights issues in your country?

(c) How can governments ensure that land restoration and LDN initiatives safeguard the land rights of those who directly depend on the land and its natural resources?

(d) Does your country have good practice examples of creating or reforming land administration infrastructure to improve the responsible governance of tenure? How have these actions contributed to initiatives that avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation?

(e) Are there examples of stakeholder engagement strategies, particularly for individuals and groups such as women, youth, indigenous peoples and local communities, that ensure participation and help ensure that their land rights and interests are fully recognized?

VI. Round table 2: Land restoration: a path to sustainable post-pandemic recovery

A. Background

25. Humans have already transformed over 70 per cent of the Earth's land area from its natural state, causing unparalleled environmental degradation, and contributing significantly to global warming. Desertification and land degradation disproportionately affect developing countries, particularly poor rural communities, smallholders, women, youth, indigenous peoples and other at-risk groups. If current trends continue during this century, scientists predict severe climate-induced disturbances, resulting in food supply disruptions, forced migrations and increased rates of species extinction – raising the prospect of declining human health, more zoonotic diseases and greater conflict over land resources.

26. With extensive analysis and numerous case examples, the second edition of the Global Land Outlook of the UNCCD demonstrates that land restoration is a proven and cost-effective solution capable of reducing and reversing land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss while lowering the risk, scale, frequency, and intensity of disasters. Sustainable land and water management practices can be applied to protect or 'rewild' natural areas, 'up-scale' nature-positive food production in rural landscapes, and 'green' urban areas, infrastructure, and supply chains. When done the right way, restoration projects and programmes can have long-term multiplier effects that stabilize and strengthen rural economies and contribute to wider regional development. These new opportunities often reach well beyond the agriculture, forestry, or conservation sectors to encompass innovative businesses models and emerging technologies that encourage the more efficient use of resources.

27. To realize the promise of the land restoration agenda, decisive action at all levels – from all actors – is crucial. As highlighted by the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests and Land Use, there is a clear need for collective and coordinated action. The UNCCD, along with many global partners and initiatives, such as the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the G20 Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and the Bonn Challenge, is championing the land restoration agenda, assisting in partnership-building and cooperation to build, scale and deliver the levels of human, social and financial capital needed to transform land use systems and restore critical natural capital.

28. During this high-level round table, Ministers will have the opportunity to discuss and showcase a wide range of restoration strategies and regenerative practices which can be tailored to local contexts and replicated at multiple scales to initiate an inclusive green recovery and boost resilience.

B. Key Question: How can we activate the land restoration agenda to fast-track green jobs recovery and sustain efforts to regenerate natural capital in order to enhance the resilience of communities, livelihoods, and the environment?

29. The following questions could be considered:

(a) There are many actors, coalitions, and initiatives promoting land restoration efforts, such as the Rio conventions, the G20 Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation, the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the Bonn Challenge. What can be done to increase coherence for enhanced implementation and to maximize the returns on land restoration investments?

(b) What are the practical entry points for scaling and sustaining LDN and restoration initiatives, including through more responsible land governance, secure tenure, integrated land use planning and inclusive forms of stakeholder engagement?

(c) What incentives can governments provide to businesses, smallholders, and indigenous peoples and local communities to support their adoption of regenerative land and water management practices?

(d) What assistance do countries need to create a pipeline of bankable restoration projects and take advantage of existing donor and funding mechanisms, such as the Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund and LDN Fund?

(e) Which experiences and/or challenges do countries face in accessing these funding streams and what skills and capacities are needed to increase finance for restoration at the national and local levels?

VII. Round table 3: The Big Dry: From disaster to drought resilience

A. Background

30. Drought puts livelihoods and ecosystems at risk, trapping vulnerable groups in a continuous cycle of poverty. Droughts are a threat with the potential to set humanity back on its great endeavour to build a sustainable future. With climate change progressing rapidly, droughts are predicted to increase in frequency, duration and severity.

31. The challenges of drought are complex, with a range of causes and impacts. Therefore, addressing drought should not be considered in isolation. We require coordination, communication and cooperation with an emphasis on integrated drought management across sectors, within and between different levels of government, and among countries. It is essential that we raise awareness and build the capacity of various stakeholders on gender-responsive measures for drought. Equally important are innovative financing schemes, such as insurance products, bonds, and microfinance. Comprehensive drought monitoring and early warning systems, assessing vulnerabilities head on and implementing solid drought mitigation measures at all levels will boost drought resilience.

32. During COP 14 in 2019, Parties to the Convention agreed to “mitigate, adapt to, and manage the effects of drought in order to enhance resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems” with a particular focus on ‘prevention’ and ‘preparedness’ via ‘green recovery’. Parties also guided the adoption and subsequent implementation of the Drought Initiative and establishment of an Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on drought which will report its findings and recommendations to Parties at COP 15.

33. Learning from the outcomes of the Drought Initiative and the prospects offered by the work of the IWG, this high-level round table will provide a timely opportunity to discuss options for a paradigm shift from drought disaster to resilience. The round table is expected to generate political momentum and the necessary guidance to usher in a new era of proactive drought risk management at all levels.

B. Key Question: How should Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification accelerate their transition from drought disaster response to resilience building which creates opportunities to address multiple risks, and advance towards sustainable development?

34. The following questions could be considered:

(a) How can we enhance global policy coordination in addressing drought and what are the necessary steps to enhance/establish those mechanisms?

(b) What are the options to boost financing for drought management? What are the gaps and challenges for countries to access existing finance and funding?

(c) How can we engage the private sector for drought resilience? What would be a feasible ‘business case’ in this respect?

(d) What are the challenges for enhancing drought early warning and monitoring and how can we turn early warning into early action?

(e) What are the major capacity gaps and which stakeholders do you think we should prioritize to accelerate drought preparedness at the regional, national and sub-national levels?

VIII. Expected result

35. A summary of the outcomes of the interactive dialogues and ministerial round-table discussions will be presented by the President of the COP in plenary for further consideration. In addition, the outcomes of the high-level segment will inform the Abidjan Declaration which will be prepared and presented by the President of the COP for the consideration of the Parties.

IX. Tentative schedule

Monday 9 May 2022		
	Tbc	Tbc
PLENARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-level opening ceremony <i>Heads of States and Governments Summit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-level opening ceremony <i>Heads of States and Governments Summit</i>
Tuesday 10 May 2022		
	10a.m. – 1 p.m.	3 p.m. – 6 p.m.
PLENARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-level opening ceremony <i>Interactive dialogue 1: Land reGeneration: The role of youth in shaping a sustainable land agenda</i> <i>Interactive dialogue 2: Future-proofing land use: Shifting patterns in production and consumption</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-level opening ceremony <i>Round table 1: Rights, rewards and responsibilities: the future of land stewardship</i> <i>Round table 2: Land restoration: A path to sustainable post-pandemic recovery</i> <i>Round table 3: The Big Dry: From disaster to drought resilience</i>