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Implementation of the Convention**

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**Improving the procedures for communication of
information as well as the quality and formats of
reports to be submitted to the Conference of the
Parties**

Conference of the Parties

Committee on Science and Technology

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Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Interfacing science and policy, and sharing
knowledge**

**Information on modalities for reporting on the
UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework**

**Improving procedures for the communication of information
as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted
to the Conference of the Parties**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Decision 11/COP.15 requested the Convention institutions to continue pursuing data-centred partnerships to enable a data-driven transformation and ensure that the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS) remains current and relevant to Parties. Furthermore, Parties requested the Convention institutions to continue supporting country capacity development to monitor the implementation of the Convention.

This document highlights all elements of reporting that have been updated, amended or improved in response to this decision and based on the recommendations made by Parties at the twenty-first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention.

The conclusion and recommendation section of this document should be read together with the relevant draft decision contained in document ICCD/CRIC(22)/8.

Pursuant to decision 11/COP.14, which welcomed the good collaboration between the Committee on Science and Technology and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention on methodological issues relating to reporting, it is proposed that this document and ensuing draft decision will become subject to joint negotiations during the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties.



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I. Introduction

1. The 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which was adopted by Parties at the thirteenth session of the Conference of Parties (COP 13), requires Parties to report on five strategic objectives (SOs) and an implementation framework. The 2018 reporting process was the first time Parties reported using the indicator and monitoring framework adopted for this strategic framework while the 2022 reporting process was the first time Parties reported on the status and trends of these indicators. The results of the 2022 reporting process were discussed by Parties at the twenty-first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 21) from 13 to 17 November 2023 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Recommendations based on the experience of Parties during the 2022 reporting process have been captured in document ICCD/CRIC(21)/11.
2. In decision 11/COP.15, Parties requested the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM), subject to available resources, to ensure that the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS) remains current and relevant to Parties, and to continue pursuing data-centred partnerships to enable a data-driven transformation as envisioned by the United Nations Secretary-General in the Data Strategy for Action by Everyone, Everywhere. Furthermore, the COP requested the secretariat and the GM to continue supporting country capacity development to monitor the implementation of the Convention.
3. In the same decision, Parties also invited Conservation International to continue enhancing Trends.Earth, and the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality (GEO-LDN) Flagship initiative to encourage the Earth observations community to develop multi-decadal high-resolution interoperable data products for reporting.
4. This document provides information on how the secretariat, the GM and their partners responded to the requests and invitations made by the COP in decision 11/COP.15 and, based on the recommendations made by Parties at CRIC 21, improved the reporting process and tools in preparation for the 2026 reporting process scheduled to commence in July 2025. It also provides details on the Global Support Programme developed by the GM and funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to support the reporting process. Information on capacity-building for reporting is included in document ICCD/CRIC(22)/6.
5. In line with decision 33/COP.15, the conclusion and recommendation section of this document should be read together with the relevant section in document ICCD/CRIC(22)/8, entitled ‘Draft decisions for consideration at the twenty-second session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention’. Pursuant to decision 11/COP.14, which welcomed the good collaboration between the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the CRIC on methodological issues relating to reporting, it is proposed that this document and ensuing draft decision will become subject to joint negotiations during COP 16.

II. Enabling a data-driven transformation

6. The United Nations Secretary-General has launched an initiative to rejuvenate the United Nations’ efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) at the mid-way point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This vision for a “UN 2.0” includes a quintet of interrelated cutting-edge skills in behavioural science, data, digital, strategic foresight and innovation in order to transform and modernize the United Nations system.
7. The secretariat is researching a commensurate UNCCD initiative to develop this Quintet of Change and enable the digital transformation of its workflows. The initiative will investigate ways of upskilling staff to leverage digital tools in the workplace, make best use of the data we gather through enhanced workflows, and harness both human and artificial intelligence (AI) for strategic foresight. This will be done through a use case-driven, problem-solving approach by collating use cases across conference services, human resources, finance, communications, policy and science in order to make our systems more efficient. The initiative will also investigate the potential of AI for more efficient and effective operations. In the spirit of SDG 17 on effective global partnerships, the secretariat will seek one or more partners to help develop and implement this digital initiative with a view to developing a

digital transformation concept that will bring enhanced services to our Parties for launch at COP 17. Partnerships with United Nations Agencies as well as entities in the private sector, universities and/or non-governmental organizations will be sought, e.g. through the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.¹ The mantra of our initiative will be to reuse our existing assets and take advantage of current systems as much as possible, and to instil a ‘digital first’ mentality.

8. This initiative complements decision 11/COP.15 which requests the secretariat to continue efforts towards upgrading its in-house data management system while pursuing data-centred partnerships to enable a data-driven transformation as envisioned by the United Nations Secretary-General in the Data Strategy for Action by Everyone, Everywhere. Tangible results have already been achieved through tools made available to Parties for national reporting, as set out in section III of this document.

III. Reporting platform and data analytics tools

A. The reporting infrastructure

9. A requirements analysis for the further development of the PRAIS has been undertaken following the lessons learned in the use of the fourth version of the platform, PRAIS 4, in the 2022 reporting process, feedback received by Parties at CRIC 21 (as contained in document ICCD/CRIC(21)/11), and a round of consultations with key stakeholders in late 2023 to early 2024. These requirements inform the nature of the necessary technical changes to make the PRAIS fit for purpose for the 2026 reporting process.

10. The PRAIS is at the core of a wider reporting infrastructure that includes the UNCCD Data Dashboard² and the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Target tracking tool. The Dashboard summarizes the 2022 reported data in a series of charts, maps and graphs and is available to the public with the primary goal of easily communicating the results and key messages to emerge from the national reporting process. The tracking tool is currently intended to function as an internal knowledge management tool accessible to UNCCD staff and consultants only. In one database, the tool consolidates the LDN targets reported by Parties as part of: (i) the country reports prepared under the LDN Target Setting Programme; (ii) their national reports during the 2018 UNCCD reporting process; and (iii) their national reports during the 2022 UNCCD reporting process. It allows the secretariat to manage those targets while responding to information requests about reported targets. Data reported through PRAIS 4 forms the basis for data and information presented on these websites. This reporting infrastructure will continue to co-evolve with the demands of the reporting process and will be sustained accordingly for the remainder of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and beyond. The system is flexible and adaptable and will be adjusted following changes resulting from either the outcome of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on the Midterm Evaluation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, or any decision Parties may take on the monitoring framework to be established for a new Strategic Framework following the conclusion of COP 16.

B. An ecosystem of tools for national reporting driven by data-centred partnerships

11. The UNCCD secretariat and the Conservation International (CI) Foundation signed a Letter of Agreement in February 2024 with the aim of keeping the Trends.Earth software,³ developed by CI, up to date to support the current and future demands of the UNCCD reporting process. Among other work, CI will enhance and improve the software as required,

¹ <https://www.data4sdgs.org/>.

² <https://data.unccd.int/>.

³ For more information on Trends.Earth see: <https://docs.trends.earth/en/latest/>.

including conducting a review of the default data, software features and functionalities available to country Parties for reporting to ensure they are fit for purpose.

12. In order to realize the vision of an open access ecosystem of tools for use by country Parties when preparing their national report, the secretariat has continued to build data-driven partnerships under the auspices of the GEO-LDN Flagship initiative. This includes a collaboration with: (i) the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on their cloud computing and geospatial platform to calculate SDG Indicator 15.3.1, the System for Earth Observation Data Access, Processing and Analysis for Land Monitoring (SEPAL);⁴ (ii) the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) hosted by the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Bern, Switzerland, on their approach to developing LDN decision support applications,⁵ and on the further development of the Land Use Planning for LDN (LUP4LDN)⁶ tool originally funded by a competitive grant from GEO-LDN; (iii) the OpenGeoHub Foundation, the International Research Center of Big Data for SDGs, and the World Resources Institute's Land & Carbon Lab to explore the use of new high-resolution land surface datasets for national reporting.

13. The secretariat is collaborating with the GEO-LDN Flagship initiative on the emerging data and analytics needs in preparation for the next reporting process due to start in mid-2025 (see timeline in section VI of this document). Under the guidance of the GEO-LDN working group 2 on Data Quality Standards, the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) is working to establish an OGC standards working group to develop internationally agreed standards for the UNCCD's geospatial reporting indicators that will promote interoperability and maximize the utility of geospatial data. Software tools that adopt these standards for indicator calculation become part of the LDN Toolbox,⁷ thereby expanding the ecosystem of tools available to Parties when preparing their national reports. Furthermore, working with the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites for the coordination of systematic earth observations for SDG Indicator 15.3.1, GEO-LDN is assessing the availability and suitability of higher spatial resolution land surface datasets for small island developing states.

14. Going beyond the reporting needs, the Convention institutions and their partners are stepping up their efforts to support the integration of LDN and related voluntary targets into (sub)national integrated land-use planning (ILUP) frameworks in those country Parties that may wish to engage in this process. Such efforts include:

(a) The deployment of a GEF 7 Enabling Activity project, executed by the GM and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which focuses on direct country assistance by integrating LDN into national land use policies and practices in a gender-responsive manner;

(b) The development by GEO-LDN of a user-focused, easy-to-use online LDN Toolbox to guide Parties in selecting analytical tools, datasets and methods for ILUP to help achieve LDN;

(c) The organization by GEO-LDN of the Global Dialogue Forum from 2 to 4 November 2023 in Cape Town, South Africa, as the first of a series of global and/or regional dialogue fora aimed at facilitating peer-to-peer exchange and in-person support on national challenges related to achieving LDN through ILUP instruments and the use of geospatial data;

(d) The development by the German development agency, GIZ, and the FAO of guidelines on how to mainstream LDN into ILUP;

⁴ For more information on the SEPAL module for Sustainable Development Goals indicator 15.3.1 see: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/925a36f9-88d7-4959-8af6-b62a04a0dc2b/content>.

⁵ For more information on the land degradation neutrality decision support applications developed by the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies, see: <https://www.wocat.net/en/ldn/wocatapps/>.

⁶ <https://www.landusetool.org/>.

⁷ <https://geo-ldn.org/ldn-toolbox/>.

(e) A feasibility study by CI, based on work outlined in the Letter of Agreement between the UNCCD secretariat and CI, for a LDN target planning tool capable of analysing and tracking the co-benefits of LDN targets with customized geospatial tool functionality.

15. Finally, as per decision 20/COP.15, GEO-LDN has concluded a grant agreement with CI to develop methodologies to identify and map areas which are likely to be vulnerable to land degradation under various climate change scenarios, as well as areas showing signs of improvement due to restoration, so that timely preventative initiatives can be implemented and returns on investments assessed.

C. Synergies in reporting

16. At its twenty-sixth session, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has recommended the endorsement of SDG indicator 15.3.1, the proportion of land that is degraded over total land area, as a component indicator under Target 2 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This recommendation paves the way for enhanced synergies in reporting between the UNCCD, which is custodian agency for this indicator, and the CBD, as the indicator could be used by CBD country Parties as a proxy of terrestrial ecosystem degradation to set a baseline for tracking progress towards the restoration of 30 per cent of all degraded ecosystems. Conversely, UNCCD country Parties are already using biodiversity-related indicators/metrics, namely the Red List Index and the average proportion of terrestrial key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas, to measure progress towards SO4 of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework.

17. In the context of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the UNCCD secretariat has worked closely with the CBD, FAO and other partners to develop a draft methodology for monitoring and reporting on areas under restoration, which is the headline indicator for Target 2 of the GBF. Concrete actions have been identified to enable more consistent reporting on restoration related targets and interventions. These include defining steps towards data interoperability between the PRAIS, which gathers information on LDN targets and interventions, and the FAO's Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring platform,⁸ which is the official monitoring platform for tracking global progress under the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, but also supports countries in reporting areas under restoration for Target 2 of the GBF.

18. Furthermore, as recommended by some Parties at CRIC 21, the secretariat has worked with the United Nations Environment Programme to integrate the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and its monitoring framework into the Data Reporting Tool for Multilateral Environmental Agreements (DaRT) to facilitate knowledge and information management for national reporting across the Rio conventions and the SDGs.⁹ Specifically, the secretariat supported the mapping of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework against CBD and SDG targets and indicators, and provided a list of UNCCD resources for inclusion in the DaRT Compendia.

IV. Improvements to the modalities of reporting

A. Strategic Objectives 1–5

19. Following feedback received from Parties and technical partners after the 2022 reporting process, the secretariat has initiated refinements to Version 2 of the Good Practice Guidance on SDG Indicator 15.3.1¹⁰ in the form of an addendum in order to correct, clarify, and supplement several theoretical and/or methodological aspects of the indicator which require further attention. At the time this document was written, the addendum was under

⁸ <https://ferm.fao.org/>.

⁹ <https://dart.informea.org/about>.

¹⁰ https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/2021-09/UNCCD_GPG_SDG-Indicator-15.3.1_version2_2021.pdf.

preparation and expected to be published online by COP 16. Critical points addressed in the addendum include: (i) the integration of information over time to assess current status and track progress in the indicator relative to the 2015 baseline; (ii) monitoring of land improvement to track progress towards SDG Target 15.3; and (iii) developments specific to sub-indicators, such as new datasets and methodological amendments, and verification of results. The development of this addendum was done through a consultative process led by a Senior Research Scientist from the WOCAT Secretariat with inputs from several experts and UNCCD technical partners involved in the development of tools for generating the indicators, as recommended by some Parties at CRIC 21. The consultative process included an expert workshop held on 13 March 2024 in Bonn, Germany.

20. Additionally, an international scientific workshop on land degradation monitoring in hyper-arid areas was held from 26 to 28 August 2024 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The workshop, organized by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, and the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification, with the facilitation of the UNCCD secretariat and United Nations Development Programme of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, focused on current challenges and scientific knowledge gaps in the application of the existing SDG 15.3.1 methodology in hyper-arid climatic zones. As the first international workshop dedicated to monitoring SDG Indicator 15.3.1 in hyper-arid areas, it aimed primarily to identify a pathway appropriate to enhance the methodological basis for two SDG 15.3.1 sub-indicators, namely the trends in land productivity and trends in soil organic carbon.

21. At CRIC 21, some Parties recommended that the secretariat refine the Good Practice Guidance for National Reporting on SO₃¹¹ with the following proposals: (i) consider non-meteorological drought types in the assessment of drought hazards; and (ii) improve the methodology for reporting on drought vulnerability to overcome challenges related to lack of data comparability. Following a consultation with the Bureaux of the CRIC and CST in a joint virtual meeting on 5 April 2024, it was agreed that such refinements would require a complete overhaul of the reporting requirements which may not be addressed in time for the scheduled launch of the 2026 reporting process. Instead, the Bureaux concurred that further work on these methodological aspects could potentially inform the development of a monitoring framework for a post-2030 UNCCD Strategic Framework, pending a decision by the COP.

22. Similarly, having considered the recommendations contained in document ICCD/CRIC(21)/1 and the reluctance of some Parties to adopt new indicators, the Bureaux concurred that any work on additional indicators to complement those currently in use could inform the development of a monitoring framework for a post-2030 UNCCD Strategic Framework. As recommended by some Parties at CRIC 21, such work on additional indicators should use a theory of change approach and consider default data availability and ongoing initiatives at the global, regional and national level, as well as indicators currently under development in the context of the GBF.

23. At CRIC 21, Parties had divergent views regarding the indicators provisionally adopted in decision 11/COP 14.¹² Some Parties were in favour of fully adopting them as tools and data are readily available and they do not place a substantial additional reporting burden on affected country Parties; others were against adopting them due to the potential diversion of funds and resources away from action on the ground and the fact that these indicators may not be clearly related to the impacts of these actions. Given these divergent opinions, a possible option would be to maintain these indicators as optional for reporting.

¹¹ https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/2021-09/UNCCD_GPG_Strategic-Objective-3_2021.pdf.

¹² These indicators are: 'Trends in the proportion of population exposed to land degradation disaggregated by sex', 'Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type' and its metric 'Average proportion of terrestrial key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas', 'International and domestic private resources', 'Technology Transfer', and 'Future resources for activities related to the implementation of the Convention'.

24. The secretariat, in collaboration with relevant data providers, and leveraging CI's Trends.Earth software, will prepare a set of default data for Parties in preparation for the 2026 reporting process, consistent with the methodological guidelines outlined in the Good Practice Guidance on SDG indicator 15.3.1, and its addendum, the Good Practice Guidance on National Reporting on SO3 and other relevant methodological notes.¹³ As recommended by some Parties at CRIC 21, to improve information flows, reduce the reporting burden and avoid duplication of data validation efforts, data on SDG indicators¹⁴ already validated by national statistics offices through the SDG reporting process will be provided as default data and synchronized with the PRAIS without the need for additional verification by Parties.

25. The secretariat has been collaborating with GEO-LDN on engaging the community of Earth Observation data providers to produce land surface datasets at 10-30 m resolution from 2000 onwards to support national reporting to the UNCCD, especially for small island developing states. A number of new land cover products are promising in this regard, such as the 30 m Global Land Cover and Land Use Change dataset for 2000–2020 from the Global Land Analysis and Discovery laboratory, University of Maryland,¹⁵ United States of America, and the 30 m global land cover dynamic monitoring product with fine classification system for 1985–2022 from Zhang et al. (2021).¹⁶ Furthermore, the OpenGeoHub Foundation is developing a 30 m ensemble product which would select the best available land cover dataset per pixel based on four input land cover datasets. The OpenGeoHub Foundation has also advanced with the development of high-resolution soil organic carbon (SOC) datasets based on the methodology of Hengl et al. (2021).¹⁷ AI combined with global point samples of SOC measurements has produced five-yearly 30 m gridded datasets based on predicted estimates of the SOC in topsoil (0-30 cm). Pending the timely conclusion of further research into the production of 30 m land productivity dynamics (LPD) by fusion of high and moderate resolution time series datasets¹⁸ and the computational resources required, e.g. through leveraging the power of data cube technology, the LPD may also be operationally produced at high resolution pending the results of piloting tests. However, it should be noted that gains in spatial resolution in one indicator will not be reflected in the overall SDG outputs as long as one or more of the other indicators remains at moderate resolution.

26. The secretariat has also continued its collaboration with the WorldPop project at the School of Geography and Environmental Sciences at the University of Southampton, United Kingdom, on the provision of default human population data for the following indicators: (i) Trends in population exposure to land degradation disaggregated by sex, under SO2; and (ii) Trends in the proportion of the population exposed to drought disaggregated by sex, under SO3. Specifically, the 100 m gridded age-sex structured human population country-level datasets from 2015–2023 will be used to estimate total, female and male population exposure to land degradation and drought. As recommended by some Parties at CRIC 21, the utility of further disaggregating this indicator by age group and geographic location will also be

¹³ <https://www.unccd.int/data-knowledge/unccd-national-reporting-process>.

¹⁴ More specifically, data on the 'proportion of the population below the international poverty line' (SDG indicator 1.1.1), the 'proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services' (SDG indicator 6.1.1), the Red List Index (SDG indicator 15.5.1) and 'Average proportion of terrestrial key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas' (SDG indicator 15.1.2, series ER_PTD_TERR).

¹⁵ Potapov P., Hansen M.C., Pickens A., Hernandez-Serna A., Tyukavina A., Turubanova S., Zalles V., Li X., Khan A., Stolle F., Harris N., Song X.-P., Baggett A., Kommareddy I., Kommareddy A. (2022) The global 2000-2020 land cover and land use change dataset derived from the Landsat archive: first results. *Frontiers in Remote Sensing*.

¹⁶ Zhang, X.; Liu, L.; Chen, X.; Gao, Y.; Xie, S.; Mi, J. GLC_FCS30: Global land-cover product with fine classification system at 30 m using time-series Landsat imagery. *Earth Syst. Sci. Data* 2021, 13, 2753–2776.

¹⁷ Hengl, T., Miller, M.A.E., Krizán, J. et al. African soil properties and nutrients mapped at 30 m spatial resolution using two-scale ensemble machine learning. *Sci Rep* 11, 6130 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-85639-y>.

¹⁸ Shen, T., Li, X., Chen, Y., Cui, Y., Lu, Q., Jia, X., & Chen, J. (2023). HiLPD-GEE: high spatial resolution land productivity dynamics calculation tool using Landsat and MODIS data. *International Journal of Digital Earth*, 16(1), 671–690. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17538947.2023.2179675>.

studied and, if deemed to be of value and subject to a COP decision, may be included as additional metrics to report under these two indicators.

27. In the PRAIS, reporting per SO1-4 will be simplified and improved through, inter alia, the creation of a country profile section, more user roles and privileges, embedded communication and quality assurance tools, form annotations for easier navigation, auto-generated notifications for report changes, progress tracking of report completion, selection of more than one default data source, and clearer documentation of metadata. The reporting forms will also be customized for affected and developed country Parties with forms marked as mandatory or optional according to Party status. Parties may also mark a form as not applicable. Non-applicable forms will not be published in the final report.

28. Reporting improvements on SO5 include different forms for recipients and providers, granting greater visibility to an editable Excel file for project-level reporting and inclusion of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development identification numbers, while indicators SO5-2, SO5-3 and SO5-4 will be subject to a general "redesign" requirement. Further information on the improvements to SO5 reporting is provided in the report of the GM (ICCD/CRIC(22)/5).

B. Implementation Framework

29. Following repeated requests by Parties to enhance the usability of the reporting forms for the implementation framework, the relevant section in the PRAIS platform was revised and revamped for each reporting round. The last iteration prior to the 2022 UNCCD reporting process was aimed at making the link with LDN implementation clearer and emphasizing the gender dimension of projects on the ground and national implementation activities.

30. However, information submitted under the implementation framework, analysed using AI technology for the first time in 2023, did not generate information suitable for inclusion in the official documents for CRIC 21. In the longer term and probably as part of the post-2030 Strategic Framework discussions, Parties will need to decide whether to maintain narrative reporting on key topics as part of the UNCCD reporting process, or whether information on action on the ground or implementation at national, subregional or regional level could not be obtained from other existing databases, such as the WOCAT which compiles more detailed information on case studies and best practices regarding desertification, land degradation, and drought. Since WOCAT is the primary recommended database on sustainable land management adopted by the COP, a cooperation framework with WOCAT could be entered into, enhancing the information available for Parties to consider during official sessions of the CRIC.

31. For the forthcoming reporting round scheduled to start in mid-2025, further amendments to the implementation framework will be made following feedback received from Parties during CRIC 21 and the last reporting process.

V. Enabling funding from the Global Environment Facility for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification reporting

32. In the past, a two-pronged approach was used to assist Parties in complying with reporting requirements under the UNCCD: (i) Parties were assisted by the GEF through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) acting as implementing agency for national level activities relating to reporting; and (ii) a Global Support Programme was executed by the GM and secretariat, primarily to provide capacity-building and technical support to Parties during the reporting process. For the next reporting process starting in 2025, national level activities will also be supported by the FAO following consultations with the GEF.

33. The Umbrella Project, entitled "Strengthening National Level Institutional and Professional Capacities of Country Parties towards Enhanced UNCCD Monitoring and Reporting" is developed and implemented by UNEP, while the UNCCD secretariat and the

GM provide support by coordinating with the country Parties and ensuring follow up. Since those funds provide Parties with support at national level, they play a critical role in enabling national level coordination and technical work without which a timely submission by the agreed upon deadline would not be possible. For the 2026 reporting cycle, the GEF, UNEP and FAO plan for an early start in providing enabling funding to Parties, allowing funds to reach countries well before the launch of the 2026 reporting process in mid-2025. By the time this document was written, the GEF had published relevant information on its website on how to access the funding available, including the different options available to receive support.¹⁹

34. According to a tentative timeline for the next reporting process, it is expected that Parties will be engaged in reporting related capacity-building and other activities from mid-2025. Consequently, the UNEP and FAO aim to develop and seek approval for their respective projects by the end of 2024, and will start the disbursement of funds to countries provided that Parties respond to the call and the requirements for submitting supporting documents in a timely manner. This timeline will ensure that funds are available at national level before capacity-building and technical work are initiated. A meeting attended by the UNCCD secretariat, GM, UNEP and GEF was held in February 2024 to discuss key deliverables for the next reporting round, including the tentative timeline for reporting. The timeline for the submission of umbrella projects and disbursement of funds was also included in the overall reporting timeline responding to a call by Parties for better synergies between the disbursement of enabling funding and the timeline for the 2026 UNCCD reporting process. In addition to support provided by the GEF, UNEP, FAO and UNCCD Convention institutions, it was highlighted that subregional or regional institutions may play a role in facilitating access to funding and/or technical support as was the case for some Parties during the last reporting process. Parties may wish to consult and agree on suitable institutions in their region or subregion and notify the UNCCD secretariat or UNEP, respectively, for them to be included in the capacity development of Parties on reporting.

35. In addition to the projects supporting Parties at national level, two GEF Medium-sized Projects have been planned in support of the 2026 reporting process. The first is the Global Support Programme (GSP IV) implemented by UNEP and executed by the GM and the secretariat, providing, inter alia, capacity-building and technical support. The second is a Medium Sized Project implemented by CI which focuses on enhancing data and analytical tools to support UNCCD country Parties with their national reporting.

VI. Reporting timeline

36. The reporting timeline has been developed with the goal of presenting the results of the 2026 reporting process at CRIC 25, scheduled to take place in 2027.²⁰ It was designed following requests made by Parties at CRIC 21 that a period of up to two years be provided for national reporting. With this goal in mind, the following milestones and deadlines have been defined and were subsequently agreed upon by the institutions involved as well as the Bureaux of the CRIC and CST:

(a) The deadline for submission of national reports will be November 2026, followed by a three-month period for quality assurance of the submitted reports by a team of technical experts, an analysis of the reports and preparation of CRIC 25 documentation. After closely monitoring the situation and progress made by Parties in reporting, a two-step submission process, as was the case for 2022 UNCCD reporting, may be considered. This would entail one deadline for data on SO1 in November 2026 and one in early 2027 for the remaining sections of the report;

(b) The SDG 15.3.1 estimates will be submitted to the United Nations Statistics Division at the end of February 2027;

¹⁹ See: <https://www.thegef.org/documents/gef-announces-support-eligible-country-parties-unccd-reporting-gef-8>.

²⁰ See annex.

(c) The official launch of the reporting process will take place around mid-2025, following the completion of preparatory methodological work, default data preparation and tool enhancements, giving countries almost 1.5 years to prepare their national reports;

(d) Capacity-building, including helpdesk services, will take place between mid-2025 and November 2026.

37. Some Parties at CRIC 21 highlighted the need to enhance stakeholder integration into the national reporting process, emphasizing the interdisciplinary and interinstitutional nature of the exercise. Data collection and compilation of estimates was another bottleneck mentioned by Parties which will be addressed by giving Parties more time to work on their reports.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

38. The reporting process continues to co-evolve in line with Parties' demands for simplification while incorporating state-of-the-art developments in data, digital tools and scientific expertise – underpinning the theoretical and methodological basis for the UNCCD monitoring framework – into the reporting procedures. The secretariat strives to strike a balance between rapid technological change while relieving the burden on Parties when completing their national reports.

39. A new United Nations-wide initiative, entitled UN 2.0, aims to catalyse action around a quintet of cutting-edge skills in order to accelerate action on the SDGs at the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on the United Nations Secretary-General's 2020–22 Data Strategy. The secretariat is researching a commensurate UNCCD initiative for the digital transformation of the Convention institutions' workflows which will be enabled through one or more strategic partnerships with a view to presenting a more mature concept to Parties at COP 17.

40. Reporting tools made available to Parties constitute an integrated reporting infrastructure with interoperable features. The PRAIS, LDN Target Tracking Tool and UNCCD Data Dashboard form an ecosystem of tools managed as one in terms of technical development and resource allocation. External tools, such as CI's Trends.Earth and FAO's SEPAL, complement this ecosystem, enabling Parties to perform analytical work on the indicators before importing a conclusive dataset into their national report working space in the PRAIS. The endorsement of internationally agreed standards by standards organizations further enables seamless integration of external tools into the UNCCD reporting infrastructure. The secretariat is making great strides in this direction which will ultimately offer more flexibility to Parties in choosing what tools and datasets to use for their national reports.

41. Data-centred partnerships, driven by the GEO-LDN Flagship initiative, continue to develop and strengthen, particularly in the development of new datasets for the sub-indicators of SDG Indicator 15.3.1. New datasets are under development which hold promise for small island developing states while regional approaches are being taken to tackle complex challenges around the application of SDG Indicator 15.3.1 in hyper-arid areas. Such partnerships also bring the state-of-the-art developments to participatory approaches in data-driven decision making, and build the capacity of national institutions to take ownership of data and technology in the preparation of their national reports.

42. Reporting across the Rio conventions continues to synergize, particularly between the UNCCD and the GBF of the CBD. Building on the synergies in reporting biodiversity indicators under SO4, the proportion of land that is degraded over total land area has been selected as a component indicator under Target 2 of the GBF. The secretariat has also mapped the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework against CBD and SDG targets and indicators to facilitate knowledge and information management for national reporting.

43. Improvements to the modalities of reporting will be evident in the 2026 reporting process. Additional features will be added to the PRAIS to enable Parties to navigate

the complexity of reporting with greater ease. There will be more flexibility in the selection of default data and reporting forms will be simplified where feasible in response to Parties' requests at CRIC 21. In the implementation framework, activities relating to LDN implementation will be given even more emphasis, while at the same time information will be gathered to demonstrate increased involvement of marginalized groups affected by land degradation and drought, e.g. women and youth, through qualitative surveys. Reporting modalities for SO5 have been improved to take into account requests from Parties raised during CRIC 21, as well as feedback received during the reporting cycle, in view of improving data comparability and data coverage, and facilitating transparency and clarity of reporting.

44. While no major overhaul of the reporting modalities is to be expected for the 2026 reporting process, the Good Practice Guidance for SDG Indicator 15.3.1 is under refinement to correct, clarify and supplement several theoretical and/or methodological aspects of the indicator which require further attention. As suggested by the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Midterm Evaluation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, further work on indicators and an analysis of their responsiveness to the SOs could inform the development of a new post-2030 monitoring framework, pending a decision by the COP.

45. Parties may wish to start the process of accessing funding for the forthcoming reporting round – scheduled to commence in mid-2025 – as early as possible and before the COP to ensure they are ready with national level preparations for national reporting by the time the new PRAIS portal becomes available.

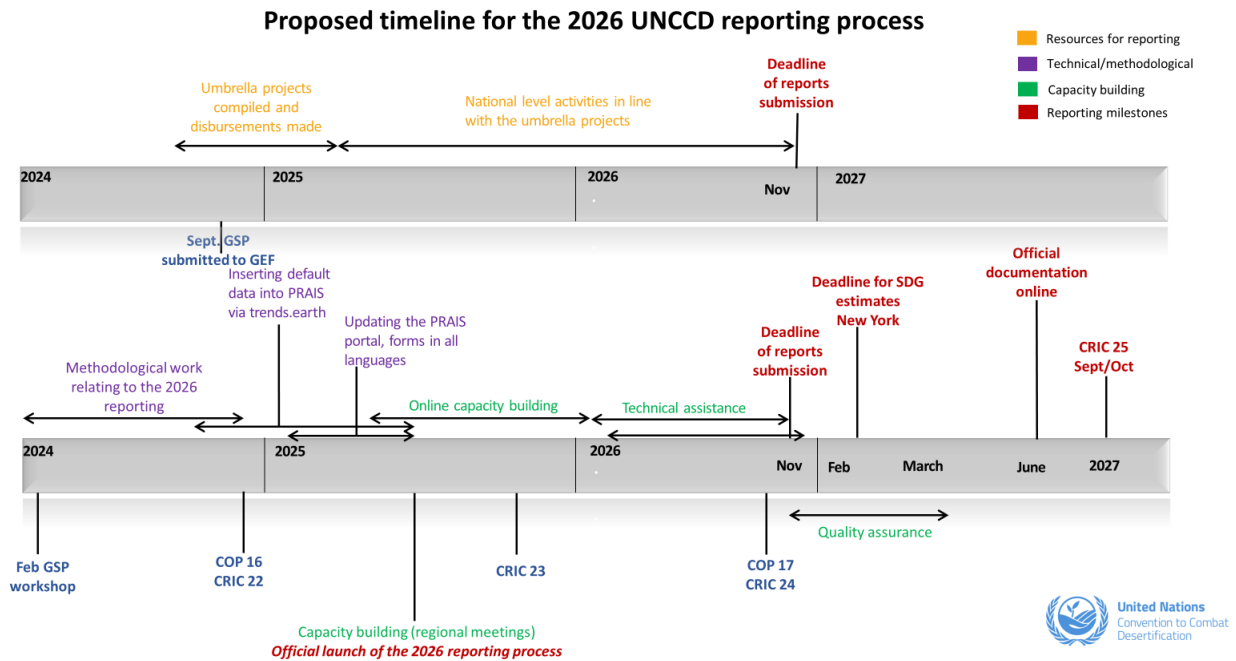
46. Parties may also wish to consult at subregional or regional level to agree on suitable organizations and/or institutions to assist in either facilitating access to the enabling funds from the GEF or becoming a partner in the capacity-building of Parties for the UNCCD reporting process.

47. In terms of national preparedness, some Parties may wish to revisit their approach of engaging national stakeholders as early as possible, recognizing the multidisciplinary nature of reporting.

Annex

[English only]

Reporting timeline



Abbreviations: GSP: Global Support Programme; GEF: Global Environment Facility; PRAIS: performance review and assessment of implementation system; SDG: Sustainable Development Goals; CRIC: Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention; COP: Conference of the Parties.