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#### Programme and budget

#### Report of the Evaluation Office

## Report of the Evaluation Office

### Note by the secretariat

#### *Summary*

The systematic evaluation of activities carried out under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) started in 2014 with the aim to strengthen the external credibility and accountability of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism and enhance their internal culture of learning.

This document presents an overview of the main findings and recommendations of the UNCCD evaluations commissioned during the triennium 2022–2024. It also provides information on the follow-up actions concerning the recommendations of earlier evaluations. Furthermore, this document presents the proposed work programme for the UNCCD Evaluation Office for the biennium 2025–2026.



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## I. Introduction

1. In line with the overall guidance of the United Nations Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation,<sup>1</sup> the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) use evaluations to (i) determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of their activities in relation to their objectives; and (ii) enable the secretariat and GM as well as Parties to engage in systematic reflection with a view to increasing the effectiveness of their main programmes by altering their content and, if necessary, reviewing their objectives.
2. The systematic evaluation of activities carried out under the UNCCD started in 2014, with the aim to strengthen the external credibility and accountability of the secretariat and the GM and enhance their internal culture of learning. The evaluations are usually prepared by independent professional evaluators and planned and supervised by the UNCCD Evaluation Office. This office also arranges for knowledge-sharing of the evaluation outcomes and follows up on the implementation of evaluation recommendations.
3. The evaluation reports and related management responses are openly accessible to Parties and other stakeholders through the UNCCD Evaluation Office web page. They are presented at meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in the context of the agenda item on programme and budget and represent an important aspect of informing Parties of progress made toward the objectives of the UNCCD workplan, following a results-based management approach. The workplan of the Evaluation Office for the forthcoming biennium is also presented at each COP.
4. At its fifteenth session (COP 15), the COP considered the recommendations of the independent evaluations and assessments that had been carried out during the biennium 2020–2021, and requested the secretariat and the GM to use these recommendations in planning and conducting their work. The COP also noted the proposed 2022–2024 workplan of the Evaluation Office and requested the Executive Secretary to report to the COP at its sixteenth session on the outcomes of the evaluations that will be conducted in 2022–2024 and on the action taken to meet the pending recommendations of earlier evaluations, as appropriate.
5. This document presents an overview of the main findings and recommendations of those UNCCD evaluations that were commissioned during the triennium 2022–2024. This document provides also brief information on the follow-up actions of earlier evaluations.
6. The United Nations Office for Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) extended its 2023 UNCCD internal audit to cover the functioning of the Evaluation Office, among other matters. The main findings of that audit are presented in the next chapter. They are also reflected in the proposed work programme for the Evaluation Office for the biennium 2025–2026, which is presented at the end of this document.

## II. Internal audit feedback of the evaluation function

7. OIOS conducted its standard internal audit of the UNCCD for 2020–2022 in February–May 2023. One of the focus areas of the audit was UNCCD corporate performance reporting and monitoring, and the evaluation function was also included in that area at the request of the Evaluation Office. For that part, the OIOS audit team was backstopped by the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division.
8. In its detailed write-up of provisional findings, OIOS considered how the United Nations practices for the evaluation function were adhered to at the UNCCD. It noted that most key factors, including the reporting line/independence of the Evaluation Office, use of recognized evaluation criteria, impartiality of evaluators, publicity of the evaluation reports, and the resources allocated to the Evaluation Office, were largely in line with the United

<sup>1</sup> See document [ST/SGB/2018/3](#).

Nations standards. In its final report, OIOS specified two aspects in need of further work: (i) the UNCCD should have a comprehensive evaluation policy to guide and standardize all phases of selecting, planning and conducting evaluations; and (ii) the follow-up of completed evaluations should be duly recorded and translated into systematic organizational learning.<sup>2</sup>

9. The UNCCD Executive Secretary agreed with the OIOS findings and recommendations, and related action is underway.

### **III. UNCCD evaluations in 2022–2024**

10. In 2022–2024, five evaluations were managed by the UNCCD Evaluation Office. In addition, the Evaluation Office completed a participant satisfaction survey immediately after COP 15. An overview of the findings and recommendations of the evaluations and the satisfaction survey, starting with the most recent, is presented in the following chapters, while the full reports can be accessed on the Evaluation Office web page. As two of the evaluations are presented in detail in other official documents (the midterm evaluation of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the external assessment of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI)), they are only briefly summarized here.

#### **A. Midterm evaluation of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (July 2024)**

11. The midterm evaluation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework was conducted under the supervision of the Intergovernmental Working Group to Oversee the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework Midterm Evaluation Process (IWG-MTE) from February 2023 to June 2024. It is built on three main documents: an evidence-based independent assessment<sup>3</sup> of the progress made, a report of the IWG-MTE to the COP presenting the findings and recommendations of the IWG-MTE, and a COP decision on enhancing the implementation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework in 2025–2030.

12. In its report, IWG-MTE structures its findings around 11 priority areas, building on the main points of the independent assessment and the feedback given by Parties during participatory consultations in November 2023. The report provides 12 recommendations, many of which propose elements and approaches that could be included in the next UNCCD strategy. The IWG-MTE report is contained in document [ICCD/COP\(16\)/2](#).

#### **B. External assessment of the Science-Policy Interface (June 2024)**

13. In line with decisions 19/COP.13 and 21/COP.15, the sixteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) will review the work conducted by the SPI, including its overall achievements, in order to decide on the future functioning of the SPI. To provide Parties with a thorough, systematic analysis of the SPI in 2017–2024, an external assessment was commissioned to consider the activities and achievements of the SPI. This assessment engaged close to one hundred people as contributors to its analysis, and was also discussed in meetings of the SPI and the CST Bureau.

14. The resulting external assessment report<sup>4</sup> found that while the SPI has improved the credibility of the UNCCD as a global science-policy authority on desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), they also indicate that the full potential of the SPI has not

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<sup>2</sup> The OIOS report 2023/036 on UNCCD is available on <https://oios.un.org/audit-reports>.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/midterm-evaluation-unccd-2018-2030-strategic-framework-independent-assessment>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/SPI%20external%20assessment%20June%202024.pdf>.

been achieved. The report makes seven recommendations for enhancing the status of the SPI, its interaction with Parties and other key stakeholders, and its products.

15. The external assessment report served as background information for the consideration of the CST Bureau on the possible future functioning of the SPI. The proposal of the CST Bureau, along with the main content of the external assessment, are contained in document [ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/6](#).

### C. Evaluation of the Gender Action Plan (January 2024)

16. At COP 13 in 2017, the COP adopted a Gender Action Plan (GAP) that complements and accompanies the implementation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework. The GAP contains five objectives that focus on:

(a) Enhancing women’s role as agents of change by addressing the gender inequalities they face;

(b) Building the capacities of women and girls to access the resources they need to improve their livelihoods, manage land sustainably and become resilient to drought;

(c) Building the technical capacities of UNCCD stakeholders at all levels to design and implement gender-responsive plans and programmes, including in land degradation neutrality (LDN) interventions;

(d) Developing a baseline on gender-related issues in land degradation and desertification and monitor, report and regularly review progress in the implementation and achievement of objectives;

(e) Mobilize adequate resources to achieve these objectives.

17. Parties play the main role in implementing action toward the objectives of the GAP, each according to their own approach, capacities and resources. The secretariat and the GM support Parties in these efforts and also bear responsibility for progress toward some of the objectives, notably objective 4 on monitoring, reporting and reviewing progress.

18. An independent external evaluation of the GAP was carried out in September 2023–February 2024 with the aim to assess the results achieved in the GAP priority areas and thereby guide further improvement of the implementation of the GAP.

19. The findings of the evaluation indicate that the GAP provides essential guidance for gender mainstreaming within the implementation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, thereby enhancing its effectiveness by promoting gender equality and empowering women in DLDD initiatives. The GAP is well aligned with the approaches, priorities and needs of countries, on-the-ground communities and other partners. In general, stakeholders considered that the UNCCD activities on (i) technical support and capacity development; (ii) knowledge products and publications; and (iii) advocacy, awareness-raising and women’s participation were particularly effective for achieving the aims of the GAP.

20. A large majority of the respondents participating in the evaluation process (78–92 per cent) considered that the GAP has improved their capacity to integrate gender equality into national/local policies and strategies or projects and programmes, increased national commitment to gender equality, and improved the understanding and awareness of gender equality. Although this increased awareness and integration of gender responsiveness into plans and programmes was observed, it was also noted that translating these efforts into practical results is often weak. There were also concerns related to resource mobilization, emphasizing the importance of continued efforts and resources to achieve the GAP objectives effectively.

21. The independent evaluation makes the following recommendations to enhance the implementation of the GAP:

(a) The GAP is further operationalized, which could include more detailed planning, systematic collection and analysis of results and lessons learned from the activities

contributing the GAP, strengthening of the role of the internal UNCCD Gender Team, and securing of funding for at least one permanent position for gender expertise within the UNCCD;

(b) UNCCD monitoring and reporting on gender equality is enhanced at all levels, which could include further use of gender-specific indicators, improving the capacity for reporting and addressing data constraints, strengthening learning and access to best practices for monitoring and reporting, and building a tracking approach for resources allocated to gender equality for the secretariat and the GM resource allocations;

(c) More UNCCD-specific guidance is provided for advancing gender equality, which may include guidance documents for conducting gender analyses in the context of LDN and drought transformative projects and programmes, pilot activities to showcase how the principles of the UNCCD technical guide for the integration of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) into the UNCCD implementation<sup>5</sup> can be translated into practical benefits for women and communities, further development of the online gender module on sustainable land management (SLM) technologies, and gender-specific materials and links in the UNCCD e-Learning Platform;

(d) Rio conventions cooperation on gender matters is strengthened to harmonize targets, indicators, and goals related to gender equality and actively promote joint efforts and coordinated action in advancing gender equality in their implementation;

(e) The role of the UNCCD Gender Caucus is enhanced, possibly aligning it with the functions of the other Rio conventions' gender-focused groups.

22. The evaluation recommendations were, for the most part, accepted by the secretariat and the GM, bearing in mind that the implementation of some of them would require additional resources. Most recommendations are integrated into the 2025–2028 workplan for the secretariat and the GM, and reflected in the official documents that are submitted to COP 16 by the secretariat.<sup>6</sup>

#### **D. Evaluation of the Land for Life Programme (October 2023)**

23. The UNCCD Land for Life Programme has three main strands: (i) the Land for Life Award, which showcases initiatives that promote LDN and SLM; (ii) two sets of champions: Goodwill Ambassadors and Land Ambassadors, who tend to be artists, musicians, or senior politicians/or diplomats; and (iii) Land Heroes, who are young people mobilized as advocates and spokespeople. An external, independent evaluation of the Programme was carried out in June–October 2023, with the aim of assessing the effectiveness of the Programme, the results achieved and its strengths and weaknesses.

24. While the evaluation considered all three components of the Programme, it was specifically geared to look at the Award and to identify options for its future. In this context, the evaluation refrained from making explicit recommendations and tried instead to clarify potential advantages and disadvantages of different options in order to assist the secretariat in revising and strengthening the Programme by drawing out lessons for its future development. The broader context for the evaluation was to support the overall sharpening of UNCCD communications, including by enhancing the contribution of the Land for Life Programme to promoting and reinforcing the UNCCD brand.

25. The evaluation found that over time, the Land for Life Award has become less attractive – including in high-level support and financial terms – while competition from other awards has increased. The role of the Land for Life Award winners in terms of UNCCD communications was noted to be unclear, and the resources for their effective use were found to be lower than for the Goodwill and Land Ambassadors and Land Heroes. The evaluation presented in detail the pros and cons of two options for the future of the Award: either ending

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/technical-guide-integration-voluntary-guidelines-responsible-governance>.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular [document ICCD/COP\(16\)/17 on the gender policy framework](#).

the Land for Life Award and focusing the Land for Life Programme on the Goodwill and Land Ambassadors and Land Heroes, or maintaining and revamping the Land for Life Award. For the latter, the evaluation presented various possibilities, such as sharpening the focus of the Award to a specific theme or group (women/youth, for example), providing a financial prize, or enhancing the profile of the Award ceremony.

26. With regard to the Ambassador and Heroes schemes, the evaluation found that the nature of the relationship with the UNCCD is different for the Ambassadors and the Heroes. The Goodwill and Land Ambassadors have their own profile and are less dependent on UNCCD than Land Heroes in terms of choosing and implementing an agenda. The key aim for the UNCCD in the case of the Goodwill and Land Ambassadors is to choose the right people: those who are committed, on-message and more or less self-servicing. The Land Heroes, on the other hand, expect the UNCCD to support them in scaling up their projects, networking and advocacy, accessing funding and building their capacity. With new Land Heroes, the UNCCD must reiterate what it can offer as well as what it expects. It is reasonable to expect that some Land Heroes may rise to senior positions in government, civil society or academia and play an ongoing UNCCD champion role. Assuming that they continue to be involved in UNCCD-related work, maintaining a long-term engagement of Land Heroes should be the default.

27. In follow-up to the independent evaluation, the secretariat is strengthening its engagement with the Goodwill and Land Ambassadors who have proven to be an asset for the Convention in terms of raising its visibility and profile. It also recognizes the potential of the Land Heroes campaign, which was relaunched in early 2024. The second cohort of Land Heroes, announced on Desertification and Drought Day 2024, was selected from over 800 entries through a more robust and geographically balanced selection process and has received a more structured introduction to UNCCD to facilitate their engagement. The secretariat is also currently revamping the Land for Life Awards, with a view to providing greater focus and incentives for participation, subject to the availability of resources.

## **E. Independent Review of the Great Green Wall Accelerator (February 2023)**

28. The Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) is a pan-African initiative to restore and sustainably manage land in the Sahara and Sahel region to address land degradation and poverty, thereby generating approaches and lessons that can be replicated elsewhere. Eleven countries in the region participate in GGWI, and in 2010 they established a Pan-African Agency (PAA) of the GGWI to coordinate its implementation and support the mobilization of resources. In 2021, several multilateral and bilateral organizations pledged a total of over USD 19 billion for the GGWI. At the same time, the establishment of the Great Green Wall Accelerator was announced to help all GGWI actors to better coordinate, monitor and measure the impact of their actions. The Accelerator unit was initially set up at the UNCCD in April 2021, with the intention to transfer it to the PAA later on.

29. To make an evidence-based consideration of progress, success and challenges of the Accelerator and to further enhance its services, an independent external review of the results and performance of the Accelerator so far was conducted in September 2022–January 2023. This review identified key activities, outputs, and progress towards outcomes catalysed by the Accelerator to date and considered whether and how these might be promoted and transitioned to other implementers within the Accelerator's intended handover timetable. The review suggested a range of options for moving forward with the work of the Accelerator, rather than providing strictly defined, specific findings and recommendations.

30. Building on its findings, the review rated the performance of the Accelerator as satisfactory. It noted the weak political support for the PAA, which translated into inadequate human and financial resources for the complex range of results the PAA is expected to help deliver. Considering that the Accelerator tasks are expected to be taken over by the PAA, the review stated that even if the work of the Accelerator is efficient and well-targeted, its results cannot be sustained in the current context. The Accelerator is supplying valuable inputs and is currently contributing towards satisfactory outputs, but whether these feed into eventual

impacts across the GGWI area largely depends on the willingness and capacity of the PAA to fully adopt the improved approaches and embed them in its operations.

31. For possible next steps, the review presents four scenarios, noting that none of them is without challenges, and that other possibilities or hybrid options may also emerge in discussions following the review. The scenarios show different degrees of transferring the work of the Accelerator to the PAA and approaches for modifying the PAA to become more capable of carrying out its mandated tasks.

32. A ministerial GGWI meeting was held soon after the publishing of the review report. The participants in that meeting welcomed the report and its messages, and while different participants had varying opinions on the next steps, everyone agreed on the need to address the challenges that came up in the review.

33. The UNCCD management response to the review was published in June 2024, which emphasized the importance of the immediate execution of the institutional audit of the PAA and launching an independent review of the whole GGWI for the period 2021–2024. In the management response, the Accelerator committed to the following actions in response to the independent review, provided that the needed resources are made available:

(a) Provision of assistance to the PAA for the preparation of a new resource mobilization framework for the period 2025–2030;

(b) Finalization of the multipurpose monitoring platform and provision of related capacity-building for the PAA and the GGWI national agencies, while making the platform and capacity-building tools accessible for the transparent use of all relevant stakeholders;

(c) Establishment of a capacity development/readiness strategy, with a focus on (i) collaboration (at national/cross-boundary level to support the development of multi-stakeholder engagement for national or regional coalitions); (ii) integration of non-state stakeholders; (iii) resource mobilization (guidance on how to write and apply for funding or readiness); (iv) monitoring of results/use of data; and

(d) Promotion of partnerships for greater Sahel collaboration to integrate regional non-state stakeholders into the delivery of the GGWI, thereby enhancing the collective impact and developing a pipeline of projects.

## **F. Participant survey: fifteenth session of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Conference of the Parties (June 2022)**

34. A COP 15 survey was carried out with the aim of finding out what went well at COP 15 and what could be improved for future official UNCCD meetings. The survey had 27 questions, most of which were scale response questions (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Almost all questions were identical to those of the survey conducted at COP 14, making it easy to compare the results and changes from one COP to another. The survey was conducted as an online questionnaire in English, French and Spanish; links were sent to the registered participants by email during the second week of the COP. A total of 295 participants responded to the survey.

35. The outcomes of the survey were generally positive, with 70–80 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction with almost all preparations and arrangements. The questions on the relevance and usefulness of the COP agenda items and decisions were rated highly by over 90 per cent of the respondents. High ratings were given also to the work of the secretariat and the GM for the quality of the official documents (84 per cent), organization of the plenary sessions (74 per cent), services for the contact groups (84 per cent) and support to regional consultations (85 per cent). Around 80 per cent of participants were satisfied with the pre-COP functions of providing practical information and registration.

36. Compared to COP 14, COP 15 received higher ratings on 12 of the 19 comparable questions. Nevertheless, the findings of the survey still identified room for improvement, particularly in the following areas:



(a) Collaboration with the host country: In order to ensure that the meeting facilities and services are of adequate quality, a checklist or a similar tool could be developed that outlines the minimum United Nations standards for conference venue security, meeting room equipment, local transportation and diversity of food;

(b) Practical arrangements: Many detailed needs concerning the conference premises were raised in the survey process, including providing small seating areas for delegates to use for work and bilateral meetings, better organizing memorabilia distribution, and setting up a lost and found desk.

37. The findings of the survey have been considered in the planning and preparations for COP 16, with the aim of meeting the identified needs as far as possible. A similar survey will be conducted close to the end of COP 16, with the aim of continuing the development of the arrangements for future COPs.

#### **IV. Follow-up to earlier United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification evaluations**

38. By its decision 10/COP.15, the COP requested the secretariat and the GM to use the evaluation recommendations when planning and conducting their work. To systematically follow up on the recommendations, the secretariat and/or the GM prepare a management response for each evaluation, outlining the action to be taken to meet the recommendations. The management responses are made public together with the evaluation reports, and they should be considered essential components of the evaluation reports.

39. This section provides a brief overview of action taken on the recommendations of evaluations that were completed during the biennium 2020–2021. More information on the listed evaluations may be found in document ICCD/COP(15)/11.

##### **1. Evaluation of the Drought Initiative (March 2022)**

40. In 2018, the COP launched a Drought Initiative, providing up to EUR 1.8 million in funding to increase the resources and momentum behind the UNCCD's drought-focused work. As the Initiative closed at the end of 2021, an external evaluation was commissioned in January 2022 to provide an overall independent assessment of its results and identify key lessons and recommendations to guide current and future actions.

41. The evaluation found that the Drought Initiative was clearly relevant to the needs of participating countries and regions, and to international efforts around drought preparedness. The Drought Initiative was also deeply relevant to UNCCD's mandate and helped to increase the profile and awareness of the Convention's focus and role in the domain of drought mitigation and management. This increased appreciation for UNCCD's mandate and role was partly achieved through the Initiative's strong focus on partnership working, which inherently helped to strengthen cooperation and improve alignment with other international institutions working on drought.

42. With regard to recommendations, the evaluation called for further support to institutional and political coordination, enhancing the profile of future projects internationally as well as nationally, improving internal coordination between the secretariat and the GM on drought matters, enhancing the budgetary control of project managers for future projects, and increasing oversight for future similar multi-country efforts by establishing steering or advisory committees to guide them.

43. Most of the recommendations are being met: the profile of drought issues in the UNCCD context has been enhanced through the two intergovernmental working groups on the topic and active advocacy and collaboration with expert partners. Internal UNCCD coordination between the policy work (secretariat) and country-level support (GM) is well-established, and UNCCD involvement in the International Drought Resilience Alliance serves as an example of promoting political coordination, raising the profile of drought issues at all levels and engaging expertise for UNCCD drought work.

## **2. UNCCD participatory gender audit (May 2021)**

44. Within the frameworks of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan and the United Nations system-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the secretariat and the GM have implemented several measures and initiatives to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment into their operations and functioning. In 2020–2021, they focused on assessing the extent to which their internal capacities, policies and practices are adequate for supporting the inclusion of gender equality in their activities. As part of that process, a gender audit in accordance with the International Labour Organization participatory gender audit methodology was carried out. All UNCCD staff were informed of and invited to contribute to the gender audit information collection process through the unit questionnaires and, should they prefer, confidential private messages.

45. The findings of the gender audit indicate that the secretariat and the GM have most of the key requirements for gender responsiveness in place or under development. They are actively using available United Nations system support, mechanisms and practices as well as capable partners for mainstreaming gender in their functioning. Good progress has been made in planning, developing and delivering gender-responsive policies, products and services for both external and internal purposes. The organizational culture is assessed as gender responsive, human resources management and policies are gender-responsive, and the UNCCD staff structure has achieved gender parity.

46. While most findings were positive, the gender audit also indicated a need for major improvements in the tracking of resources allocated to gender equality and building staff capacity in gender-responsive budgeting. In response, some UNCCD staff participated in training from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on gender-responsive budgeting, but further work is still needed in this area.

## **3. Second evaluation of the Changwon Initiative (April 2021)**

47. Funded by the Republic of Korea since 2011, the Changwon Initiative focuses on consolidating partnerships, facilitating scientific advice and synergies, and promoting knowledge-sharing and public mobilization to support the implementation and integration of LDN in broader sustainable development policies and processes at the national and international levels. Its second evaluation covered the period 2016–2020.

48. The evaluation found that the Changwon Initiative has catalysed the emergence, recognition and stabilization of the UNCCD as a leading global institution addressing DLDD and enabled it to support the majority of its partner countries in formulating approaches and, increasingly, policies to move towards LDN. It has played a vital role in enabling the UNCCD to get closer to the field and respond to the pressing needs of partner countries, and helped to facilitate UNCCD contributions to key scientific knowledge and the dissemination and use of said knowledge through knowledge management and capacity-building. The evaluation recommended that the Changwon Initiative be continued with a focus on (i) activities that can have maximum effects at country and regional level; and (ii) the underlying processes of knowledge generation/dissemination and capacity-building that will be essential to enable and promote the success of these activities.

49. The evaluation recognized delays and inconsistencies in spending the funding under the Changwon Initiative and recommended that the secretariat (i) improve its analysis of human resources availability in the planning for future contributions; and (ii) conduct a detailed review of the outstanding Changwon Initiative balances. The secretariat and the GM accepted the recommendations and launched related measures. By June 2024, most of the delays were over and the implementation of the planned activities were back on schedule.

## **4. Enhancing business sector engagement (January 2021)**

50. A study of UNCCD business sector engagement was commissioned by the Evaluation Office in 2020–2021, including an evaluation of the business sector engagement and, building on the findings of the evaluation, the development of elements for a new business sector engagement strategy. The evaluation recognized the diverse roles of the business sector in advancing the objectives of the UNCCD, and the need to further develop and refine the UNCCD approach to business sector engagement. Among the findings of the evaluation

were (i) a perceived mismatch between UNCCD country priorities (such as the LDN targets) and business sector interests; (ii) the complexity of the UNCCD operational modalities and requirements as an intergovernmental treaty body from the private sector viewpoint; and (iii) limited staff and other UNCCD resources for partnering with the business sector, among other things.

51. The evaluation recommended that the secretariat and the GM develop a long-term vision for business sector engagement with the UNCCD by identifying key strategic aims and priorities, expected results and associated modalities of collaboration. The recommendations also included many detailed proposals for encouraging private sector engagement, such as developing a platform for the business sector to collaborate, access and share information, revamping communications targeting the business sector, and improving knowledge management on business sector engagement through the systematic tracking of related resources and results.

52. In their management response to the evaluation, the secretariat and the GM noted that they would have welcomed a deeper analysis of the various results, strengths and weaknesses, so as to have a more substantial and specified basis for the consideration of future activities. They nevertheless agreed with the emphasis given in the evaluation report to the importance of UNCCD private sector engagement leading to widespread business behavioural change and progress in preventing land degradation as well as restoring already degraded land.

53. The UNCCD Private Sector Strategy was launched at COP 15. While it covers most of the points contained in the evaluation, it generally goes further and deeper in encouraging private sector transition to sustainable productive practices. The Strategy spells out a clear target – to restore 1.5 billion hectares of degraded land by 2030 – with a focus on facilitating investments and technology for sustainable production and promoting the expansion of value chains for sustainable consumption. Further information on recent UNCCD work on private sector engagement can be found in document [ICCD/COP\(16\)/13](#).

## **5. Evaluation of UNCCD support to the development of land degradation neutrality transformative projects and programmes (February 2021)**

54. The GM programme for the development of land degradation neutrality transformative projects and programmes (LDN TPPs) was established in 2018 to provide early-stage support to countries and regions seeking investments for LDN projects. An independent formative evaluation aimed to assess LDN TPP performance so far and provide guidance for future activities.

55. The evaluation found that the country-driven approach of the LDN TPPs has assured their relevance to country/regional needs and priorities and their coherence with policies and activities by involved countries and regions. LDN TPPs were said to be on track to deliver their anticipated short-term results, with this effort currently underpinned by sufficient financial resources and a well-regarded LDN TPP team. Some inefficiencies due to relatively rigid internal planning and approval procedures were noted. However, country and partner representatives that participated in the LDN TPP evaluation were universally complimentary about the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of support. To ensure the sustainability of LDN TPP results, the project partners involved in the evaluation highlighted the importance of continuing GM engagement with projects during their actual implementation.

56. The TPP evaluation recommended that the GM identify options for continued engagement with projects during implementation in order to build and share knowledge around the reality and practical challenges of LDN, and develop a broader, longer-term monitoring strategy that focuses on measuring the longer-term influence and contribution of LDN TPPs. The GM was also suggested to articulate clearer ‘pitches’ for LDN’s role in addressing climate change so as to provide potential projects with material that can support access to climate finance. Furthermore, it was recommended to review and reform the identified inefficient financial management and approval processes.

57. All evaluation recommendations were either fully or partially accepted, and the implementation of related measures has influenced the planning of the Project Preparation Partnership (PPP). With regard to improving project administration and management, in the past years the secretariat and the GM have developed several standard operating procedures,

some of which directly target the PPP modalities, that have streamlined and sped up internal administrative and approval processes.

#### **6. Evaluation of the New York Liaison Office (June 2020)**

58. The UNCCD New York Liaison Office (NYLO) went through a light-touch organizational assessment in 2020, which assessed its performance and achievement and considered (i) organizational motivation; (ii) organizational capacity; and (iii) an enabling environment as key factors that affect performance. The findings of the evaluation indicate that NYLO has generally met the aims that were set for it, and that it can be particularly effective when it promotes a topic that is directly relevant for a process that is centralized to New York (such as linking LDN with the Sustainable Development Goals); and/or advocates for a topic that is brand new, particularly high on the political agenda, or for which attention/approval beyond the UNCCD constituency is necessary. As NYLO is a small office, the evaluation noted that the achievement of tangible results would benefit from NYLO focusing its activities on those that are most likely to produce the best results for the UNCCD without spreading its resources too thin. Better coordination and complementarity of the activities of NYLO and those of the Bonn-based secretariat could assist in identifying the activities on which NYLO will focus and provide NYLO with a broader technical knowledge base. In terms of resources, the evaluation found that the NYLO office equipment is in a serious need of an update.

59. Building on the findings and their analysis, the evaluation recommends that NYLO formulate for every biennium a brief (internal) work programme derived directly from the secretariat's corporate work programme that specifies its aims and main activities and enhances its approach to partnership-building with selected New York or Washington-based organizations. The secretariat is recommended to continue improving regular information-sharing between NYLO and the Bonn-based units and ensure that NYLO resources are commensurate to its workload.

60. Since the evaluation, NYLO's (online) participation and role in the daily routines of the secretariat has significantly increased, which has been facilitated by the overall increase in the use of digital communications following the COVID-19 pandemic. The implementation of the other recommendations is still underway, mainly due to the recent changes in the NYLO staff and the re-organization of many United Nations offices in New York.

### **V. Evaluation Office: 2025–2026 work programme**

61. As described in section II, the OIOS report on the 2020–2022 UNCCD audit specified two aspects in need of further work in the Evaluation Office: (i) The UNCCD should have a comprehensive evaluation policy to guide and standardize all phases of selecting, planning and conducting evaluations; and (ii) the follow-up of completed evaluations should be duly recorded and translated into systematic organizational learning.<sup>7</sup> Meeting this recommendation will entail further development and update of the current UNCCD approach and tools for evaluations, and will be a central element of the 2025–2026 Evaluation Office work programme.

62. In addition, two evaluations concerning activities funded from voluntary contributions are planned to be carried out during the biennium: an evaluation of the Peace Forest Initiative and the final evaluation of activities funded through the contribution agreement with Canada that finishes at the end of 2025.

63. The Evaluation Office work programme may be adjusted in the light of other tasks or further evaluation or assessment requirements assigned by the COP. Evaluations of activities that have been funded from extrabudgetary sources will be covered from the budget of each activity.

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<sup>7</sup> The OIOS report 2023/036 on UNCCD is available at <https://oios.un.org/audit-reports>.

## **VI. Conclusions and recommendations**

**64.** This document presents the main outcomes and recommendations of evaluations carried out since COP 15, as well as the action taken by the secretariat and the GM to meet the recommendations of the earlier evaluations.

**65.** This document also presents the provisional plan for the evaluations to be carried out in the coming biennium. The COP may wish to:

- (a)** Take note of the proposed Evaluation Office work programme;
  - (b)** Request the Executive Secretary to report to the COP at its seventeenth session on the outcomes of the evaluations that will be conducted in 2025–2026 and on the action taken to meet the pending recommendations of earlier evaluations.
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