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## **New UN estimates show the world could save billions annually and earn trillions more by investing in healthy land**

- **World needs US\$ 1 billion daily to combat desertification, land degradation and drought between 2025 and 2030**
- **Total Investment Required Equals Annual Spending on Environmentally Harmful Subsidies**
- **First-ever financial needs assessment for UNCCD launched at COP16 in Riyadh**

**Bonn/Riyadh 3 December 2024:** At least USD 2.6 trillion in total investments are needed by 2030 to restore over one billion hectares of degraded land and build resilience to drought, according to the latest report from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

The "Investing in Land's Future: Financial needs assessment for UNCCD" report, launched today at the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) to UNCCD in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia calls for US\$1 billion in daily investments between now and 2030 to meet the world's land restoration targets and combat desertification and drought.

Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, said: "To protect lives and livelihoods, we must significantly increase investments in land restoration. The returns—both financial and societal—are undeniable. Every dollar invested in healthy land is a dollar invested in biodiversity, climate, and food security. The good news is that the world could save billions annually and earn trillions more by restoring land back to health and building resilience to drought".

Up to 40% of the world's land is degraded, affecting over 3.2 billion people, with the highest costs borne by those who can least afford it: indigenous communities, rural households, smallholder farmers, and especially youth and women.

The situation is compounded by the sharp rise in droughts—up by 29% since 2000—with projections showing that by 2050, three in four people worldwide could be affected. Yet, despite this escalating crisis, global investments needed to meet the world's land restoration and drought resilience goals are falling short by \$278 billion each year.

### **Key Report Findings**

- **Financing is increasing but large gaps remain:** Global investments to combat desertification and land degradation rose from \$37 billion in 2016 to \$66 billion by 2022. However, \$355 billion per year is needed between 2025 and 2030 to close the financing gap, resulting in a \$278 billion shortfall.

- **Losses outstrip investments needed:** Desertification, land degradation, and drought already cost the global economy \$878 billion every year—far more than the investments needed to tackle these issues. These costs include reduced agricultural productivity and ecosystem services, the social costs of carbon losses, and damages caused by drought.
- **Investing wisely:** The total amount of investment needed between now and 2030 to reach land and drought resilience targets—US\$ 2.6 trillion—is equivalent to what the world wastes each year on harmful environmental subsidies, according to the recent report by Earthtrack.
- **High returns on investment:** Investing in land restoration delivers significant benefits, generating an estimated \$1.8 trillion in annual returns. This represents a return on investment of up to \$8 in social, environmental, and economic gains for every dollar invested.. This includes improved agricultural productivity, increased drought and climate resilience, and improved ecosystem services.
- **Unlocking private investment:** Private sector currently contributes only 6% of necessary funding towards land restoration and drought resilience. Public-private partnerships, blended finance models, and green bonds are key strategies to mobilize capital. Unlocking private investment could accelerate land restoration, creating economic opportunities and environmental benefits, particularly in the hardest-hit regions.
- **Africa's urgent needs:** Africa faces the largest financing gap, needing \$191 billion annually to restore 600 million hectares of degraded land. This reflects not only significant challenges but also the continent's unmatched land restoration ambition—the highest globally. Losing over 100 football pitches of healthy land every minute threatens livelihoods, food and water security, and public health, with potential to disrupt regional economies and global trade.

### **The staggering cost of inaction**

Without urgent financial support, the socio-economic impacts of land degradation will deepen, driving instability and forced migration. Crop yields could decline by up to 50% in some regions by 2050, driving food prices up by 30% and intensifying food insecurity, particularly in vulnerable areas. For communities already struggling with limited resources, these pressures will exacerbate poverty, strain livelihoods, and increase the risk of resource-driven conflicts. Africa stands at a critical crossroads.

### **Bridging financing for a sustainable future**

There is real potential to close the \$278 billion annual funding gap through innovative financial solutions. Repurposing harmful agricultural and forestry subsidies can unlock billions for sustainable land management, transforming restoration efforts. With increased private sector involvement, alongside public investments, the \$355 billion needed each year can be mobilized more effectively.

Africa, facing the largest shortfall, can significantly benefit from these efforts. Immediate commitments to restore 600 million hectares are critical, and tools like sustainability bonds provide fresh opportunities for financing.

## Leveraging the benefits of restoration

Investing in land restoration offers far-reaching benefits. Restoring over one billion hectares will enhance ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and water management, playing a crucial role in mitigating climate change. The economic, social, and environmental returns of these investments support progress on key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including poverty reduction, zero hunger, and climate action.

"This report highlights the critical urgency of addressing the massive financing gap for land restoration," said Louise Baker, Managing Director of UNCCD's Global Mechanism. "Achieving global restoration targets by 2030 demands unprecedented collaboration between governments, the private sector, and international organizations. With escalating threats from climate change and land degradation, scaling up investments is essential—not just to meet targets but to secure the planet's future and improve the well-being of billions worldwide. The Global Mechanism is actively supporting countries in securing diverse funding sources, ensuring that no opportunity for investment in sustainable land restoration and restoration is left untapped."

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*Download the full report*

The full report **Investing in Land's Future: Financial needs assessment for UNCCD** is available in English: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/investing-lands-future-financial-needs-assessment-unccd>

### Media enquiries

For media enquiries please contact UNCCD Press Office at [press@unccd.int](mailto:press@unccd.int) or Portland Communications at [unccd@portland-communications.com](mailto:unccd@portland-communications.com)

Social media assets are available [here](#).

### About UNCCD

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is an international agreement on good land stewardship. It helps people, communities and countries create wealth, grow economies and secure enough food, clean water and energy by ensuring land users an enabling environment for sustainable land management. Through partnerships, the Convention's 197 Parties set up robust systems to manage drought promptly and effectively. Good land stewardship based on sound policy and science helps integrate and accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, builds resilience to climate change and prevents biodiversity loss.

### About the Global Mechanism

Established in 1994 under Article 21 of the UNCCD, the **Global Mechanism (GM)** facilitates the mobilization of financial resources to combat desertification, land degradation, and drought. It offers



advisory services and collaborates with developing countries, donors, and the private sector to secure the funding necessary for implementing the Convention's goals.

### **About COP16**

The Conference of the Parties (COP) was established by the Convention as its main decision-making body. It is made up of UNCCD's 197 Parties (196 countries and the European Union) and is responsible for guiding the Convention so that it can respond to global challenges and national needs. UNCCD COP16 will be a landmark event to raise global ambition and accelerate action on land and drought resilience through a people-centred approach. It will coincide with the Convention's 30th anniversary. UNCCD COP16 is the first major UN conference hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It will also be the first time a UNCCD COP is held in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which knows firsthand the impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought.