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Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels
Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

Decision 2/COP.16 requested the secretariat, subject to the availability of financial resources, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism (GM) and other relevant initiatives, to develop a capacity-building strategy to mainstream capacity-building across the Convention institutions and any other associated initiatives. Additionally, it called for innovative, technology-driven approaches, gender empowerment, youth fellowships, enhanced training, and collaboration.

This document provides information on recent capacity-building activities of the secretariat, the GM and Convention-hosted initiatives, in line with decision 2/COP.16. Most notably, this document broadly addresses the request from Parties to develop a capacity-building strategy, providing a synopsis of the gaps, challenges and opportunities for capacity-building throughout the Convention's implementation history.

The document also contains some conclusions and recommendations for consideration by the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention at its twenty-third session.

Contents

I. Introduction

1. At its sixteenth session, the Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) adopted decision 2/COP.16 on capacity-building, recognizing its central role in advancing the Convention's objectives. The decision requests the secretariat to, subject to the availability of financial resources, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism (GM) and other relevant initiatives to develop a comprehensive, multi-year capacity-building strategy and work programme, with a focus on supporting developing countries, particularly least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS). The decision highlights the importance of innovative, technology-driven approaches – including artificial intelligence (AI) – to enhance accessibility, participation and effectiveness in implementing the Convention. Furthermore, it calls for the redesign of an important but currently inactive capacity-building tool (the Capacity Building Marketplace), the expansion of online and blended training opportunities, and the promotion of South–South, North–South and Triangular cooperation.

2. By its decision 4/COP.16, the COP decided to establish the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention (IWG-FSF), which is tasked with delivering two key outputs for the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17):

(a) Key elements – including potential goals and targets – for a post-2030 strategic framework based on lessons learned from the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework), drought-related work, and past COP decisions;

(b) An analysis of current national reporting indicators to enhance their responsiveness for the post-2030 strategic framework, ensuring future methodologies are feasible, simple to understand, and within Parties' capacities, while also considering the guidance from decision 8/COP.16.

3. The outcomes of the IWG-FSF are expected to play a significant role in shaping the future capacity-building orientation and strategy of the Convention.

4. Further to the parallel processes of developing a future strategic framework for the Convention and a new capacity-building strategy, austerity measures on spending resources are currently in place in the secretariat to deal with the uncertainties in the current global geopolitical environment as well as the system-wide United Nations reform process under the UN80 Initiative.[1]

5. In this regard, an extensive effort to develop a comprehensive capacity-building strategy, while critical to the activities of the secretariat, is currently rendered unimplementable and consequently deferred for a more opportune time in tandem with the work of the IWG-FSF, contingent upon adequate financial and staffing resources.

6. Nevertheless, this document provides information on how the secretariat, the GM, and associated initiatives have responded to the requests contained in decision 2/COP.16, specifically addressing the critical need to develop a capacity-building strategy. Since COP 16, the limited resources available compelled the secretariat to focus its efforts on evaluating the current capacity-building landscape of the UNCCD, which then informed the development of broad considerations for the future strategic orientation for capacity-building within the Convention and its associated processes.

II. Evolution and strategic role of capacity-building in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

7. The mission of UNCCD capacity-building, derived from Article 19 of the Convention, is to support country Parties with capacity-building services aimed at promoting an effective implementation of the Convention and its strategic frameworks, as well as the relevant

[1] See https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/en

decisions taken by the COP. In that regard, a strong capacity-building framework is essential for helping country Parties, notably the LDCs and SIDS and their local stakeholder groups and partners, to effectively engage in addressing the emerging issues and challenges of the implementation process.

8. Throughout its history, especially in the early decade of implementation, capacity-building under the UNCCD has frequently been conceptualized as an associated and cross-cutting objective within broader programmes rather than as an independent and stand-alone initiative. Capacity-building is generally embedded across multiple decisions in each COP, typically highlighted within the operational or thematic context of the specific decision in which it is mentioned, including in decisions that mention the multi-year workplan of the Convention. Capacity-building often occurs alongside larger initiatives, such as land degradation neutrality (LDN) projects, sustainable land management (SLM) technologies and approaches, and national reporting activities. This embedded nature of capacity-building has important implications for the planning, design, financing, implementation, and coordination of interventions within the secretariat, the GM, and associated initiatives.

9. Launched in 2013, the Capacity Building Marketplace is considered one of the flagships under the UNCCD and was included as a target of operational objective 4 on capacity-building as adopted in decision 1/COP.11. The Capacity Building Marketplace has made remarkable achievements over the years, which have been appreciated by Parties and the wider public, and reaffirmed by various COP decisions. The secretariat has pursued the integration of the Capacity Building Marketplace into the main UNCCD website, however, the reconceptualization and redesign of the Capacity Building Marketplace mandated by decision 2/COP.16 has been hampered by a number of challenges relating to, inter alia, limited staffing, budgetary constraints and structural developments.

10. Building on the experiences and lessons learned by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) through (a) the Capacity Award Programme to Advance Capabilities and Institutional Training in one Year (CAPACITY);[2] and (b) the UNFCCC – UNU Early Career Climate Fellowship Programme,[3] the COP, by its decision 2/COP.16, expanded the targeted capacity-building to support the implementation of the Convention by requesting the secretariat to develop, subject to the availability of financial resources, an early and mid-career fellowship programme targeted at youth and especially women from the most vulnerable local communities, especially SIDS and LDCs.

11. Other relevant COP decisions have continued to strengthen the need and mandate for capacity-building. The UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, adopted at COP 13, stated that capacity development at all levels and across sectors is essential for the effective implementation of the Convention and for achieving LDN. Strategic objective 5 of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework explicitly links capacity-building to resource mobilization, calling for substantial and predictable financial resources, technical assistance, and technology transfer to support implementation at all levels. Additionally, COP 13 saw the adoption of the Gender Action Plan through decision 30/COP.13, which committed the Convention to gender-responsive capacity-building programmes that empower women and girls in SLM. Decision 2/COP.14 requested the secretariat and the GM to continue supporting capacity-building efforts with relevant partners, to facilitate the achievement of LDN, with particular focus on LDN monitoring and the effective development of LDN transformative projects and programmes.

12. Technological innovation has emerged as a defining feature of the UNCCD's capacity-building approach in recent years. Decision 2/COP.14 encourages the use of digital tools such the Drought Toolbox, while decision 8/COP.14 requested the secretariat to increase the policy relevance of Earth observation data, tools and interfaces for the national reporting process. Since then, digital tools and platforms have become central to national reporting and geospatial monitoring, particularly for the 2022 national reporting process, which saw updates to the performance review and assessment of implementation system

[2] See: https://unfccc.int/capacity-fellowship-programme.

[3] See: https://unu.edu/vie/our-work/partnerships-and-outreach/unfccc-unu-early-career-climate-fellowship-programme.

(PRAIS), the UNCCD Data Dashboard, and the Trends.Earth software, developed by Conservation International. These tools are further supported by e-learning modules and blended learning strategies. Building upon previous decisions, decision 2/COP.15 further called for the development and expansion of existing tools to strengthen learning and capacity development, while also encouraging the expansion of innovative approaches in capacity-building. This reflects a broader shift in the Convention's strategy, as capacity-building is no longer limited to traditional training but being increasingly driven by digital transformation, data-driven platforms, and innovative learning methods that integrate science, policy and practice.

13. Decision 23/COP.15 places strong emphasis on capacity-building as a vital component of enhancing drought resilience, as it encouraged Parties to develop and implement integrated drought management plans that strengthen national and regional capacities. The decision highlights the importance of inclusive participation, actively involving women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and civil society in drought resilience efforts. It promotes the use and continuous updating of the UNCCD Drought Toolbox to support technical and institutional capacity development. Furthermore, Parties requested the secretariat, through decision 8/COP.15, to facilitate and strengthen communities of learning and practice (CLPs) to facilitate knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning on drought risk management, leading to the collaborations with Global Water Partnership.[4].

14. Decision 3/COP.16 emphasized capacity-building as essential for effective resource mobilization and implementation, calling for the strengthening of technical and institutional capacities, particularly in vulnerable countries, to improve their ability to develop, access and utilize financial resources. Decision 18/COP.16 reinforced capacity-building as a core enabler of knowledge-sharing and technology transfer and emphasized stepping up the secretariat's capacity to manage and facilitate innovative platforms, partnerships and exchange.

15. The Convention emphasizes the importance of synergy with the sister Rio conventions – the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UNFCCC – especially in Article 8. The Joint Liaison Group (JLG) has been established to promote coordinated implementation, and a Joint Capacity-Building Programme is being rolled out to train national stakeholders on cross-cutting themes. This initiative supports the development of individual, institutional and systemic capacities to enable more integrated implementation and reporting aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, financial and human resources to effectively facilitate synergistic approaches by the UNCCD secretariat are inadequate. Also, reporting processes across the three Conventions remain largely siloed, highlighting the need for further harmonization.

16. While the mandates are clear and the tools are being updated to become more sophisticated, effective capacity-building implementation has often lagged due to limited staffing, underfunding, and fragmented coordination. The secretariat's ability to deliver effective capacity-building at scale remains constrained by internal structural and operational challenges. A reveal of past audit recommendations[5] reveals that key initiatives – such as the establishment of a dedicated capacity-building unit, the development of a secretariat-wide innovation agenda, and the rollout of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for capacity-building – remain unimplemented.

[4] See https://www.gwp.org/en/.

[5] See www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/2024-07-24%20BoA%20Report%20on%20UNCCD%20FY%202023%20-%20Signed.pdf.

III. Delivery and implementation of capacity-building and innovation activities under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

17. Several key units of the secretariat collectively deliver a wide range of capacity-building initiatives under the Convention, each contributing unique expertise and tools toward the Convention's objectives.

18. The Science, Technology and Innovation unit within the UNCCD secretariat serves as the main hub for capacity-building activities, supporting the delivery of specialized services. The Capacity-Building and Innovation subunit managed core platforms such as the currently inactive Capacity Building Marketplace and the UNCCD e-Learning Platform, as well as initiatives targeting youth, women, and academic engagement. The Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) subunit of the STI supports countries with national reporting requirements and data partnerships. It advances the use of digital tools and Earth observation technologies for LDN monitoring and target-setting. It provides digital resource platforms, namely PRAIS and the UNCCD dashboard that underpins reporting and data-driven decision-making. On the other hand, the CST/science subunit of the STI focuses on scientific input through the work of Science-Policy Interface (SPI); this is in response to the request to the secretariat to support the interaction of regional scientific networks/institutions with the SPI (see decision 20/COP.16). Although each of these subunits plays a vital role, resource constraints – particularly funding and staffing – limit the ability to scale operations, especially with the current vacancy for a capacity-building officer in the secretariat.

19. The GM serves as an operational arm of the Convention, tasked with supporting and enhancing countries' ability to mobilize resources. Under the guidance of various COP decisions, including decision 13/COP.14, the GM supports Parties in developing national projects, accessing climate finance, and building institutional capacities for financial planning and project development. It also facilitates South–South cooperation and explores innovative financing mechanisms to further bolster national efforts. Most notably, the GM supports targeted capacity-building by assisting countries in achieving LDN. It has strengthened national focal points' abilities to access climate finance and private finance, promoted joint planning with ministries and development banks, and fostered technical skills in geographic information systems, integrated land-use planning, and behavioural change communication. Currently, GM initiatives include the second phase of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP),which organized a global capacity-building inception workshop in Doha, Qatar, on 22–24 February 2024 and a knowledge exchange webinar held online on 14 November 2024). Also under the LDN TSP, the GM launched an Enabling Activity project titled "Integrating LDN into land use planning frameworks to strengthen national UNCCD enabling environments" under the seventh replenishment of the Global Environment Facility. This project began with a capacity-building inception workshop on mainstreaming LDN into integrated land use planning policies and tools, which was delivered in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 13–16 May 2025. The GM has also supported capacity-building efforts being undertaken under the Great Green Wall Initiative data consolidation process and within collaborative financing platforms.

20. As an associated initiative of the UNCCD launched in 2020, the Group of 20 Global Land Initiative (G20 GLI) addresses land degradation and promotes conservation through political leadership and practical collaboration. The G20 GLI places strong emphasis on sharing knowledge and building capacity. It supports peer-to-peer learning between G20 and non-G20 countries. The G20 GLI has advanced capacity-building and innovation for land restoration through multiple initiatives. The G20 GLI-sponsored Restoration Returns Grant for 2025 provides up to USD 17,000 for community-led restoration, prioritizing developing countries, with potential for multi-year funding. The Global Restoration Information Hub consolidates data on legislation, technologies, training and best practices to strengthen knowledge-sharing. Education efforts include the first university curriculum on sustainable agriculture for land restoration, and a second module focused on sustainable urban land

restoration. [6] Co-developed by professors and experts worldwide, these open-source curriculum modules provide comprehensive resources to educators and serves as a ready-to-use tool for teaching land restoration practices. Through a "training of instructors" approach, 400+ university teachers have been able to integrate these modules into their own university courses. The Save Land: United for Land museum exhibition at the *Bundeskunsthalle* (Art and Exhibition Hall) in Bonn boosted public engagement, fostering awareness until mid-2025.[7] The Global Restoration Commitments Database,[8] developed with the International Union for Conservation of Nature following decision 20/COP.15, tracks pledges totaling 1.2 billion hectares, including major G20 commitments.

21. Capacity-building within the Global Policy Advocacy and Regional Coordination (GPARC) unit of the UNCCD secretariat is focused on fostering policy dialogue, technical cooperation, and knowledge exchange among governments, United Nations agencies, and partners. It strengthens policymaking through joint initiatives with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Meteorological Organization, and other entities, offering guidance on integrating thematic agendas, such as drought resilience and sand and dust storms (SDS), into national frameworks. For drought, global and regional CLPs and targeted workshops train policymakers in integrated drought management using the Drought Toolbox, while new resources such as the Global Drought Atlas and the Economics of Drought Resilience report support evidence-based decisions. For SDS, voluntary policy guidelines and the SDS Toolbox equip national authorities with practical tools and case studies to integrate SDS management into policies. The Regional Liaison Offices under the GPARC unit act as vital connectors between the secretariat and Regional Implementation Annexes. They assist in coordinating training sessions, regional preparations for COP and CRIC meetings, and in identifying host countries for regional events. However, their current limited staffing – often only one professional officer per Regional Implementation Annex – restricts their ability to proactively support capacity-building efforts beyond periodic engagements.

22. The Communications, External Relations and Partnerships (CERP) unit of the secretariat plays a growing role in coordinating partnerships and donor relations. It also enhances external engagement and maintains the UNCCD website. Recent notable capacity-building activities organized by CERP include several targeted media trainings in 2024. A Science Media Communications Training workshop improved scientists' engagement with the media, while spokesperson training prepared UNCCD representatives for COP 16. In a joint UNCCD-UNFCCC event, Russian-speaking journalists received training during the sessions of the UNFCCC subsidiary bodies in Bonn. Saudi Arabia hosted a national media session linking land, climate and biodiversity, and Côte d'Ivoire held a regional workshop for French-speaking journalists from 15 African countries, resulting in over 30 published articles. To further strengthen outreach, a training for Arabic-speaking journalists from the Middle East and North Africa was held ahead of COP 16 in Riyadh.

23. Despite the involvement of multiple stakeholders, coordination among UNCCD entities remains an area for improvement, including in the design, financing and implementation of capacity-building activities. There is need for stronger collaboration and harmonization between the different units, which share mandates (some of which overlap) and often have the same target audiences.

IV. Assessing the capacity-building and innovation landscape of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

24. The scope of the UNCCD's capacity-building and innovation activities has evolved significantly over the past two decades, thus progressively enhancing the implementation of the Convention, albeit in a limited way. The secretariat engaged a consultant that supported the evaluation of the capacity-building landscape of the Convention. This structured

[6] See https://g20land.org/university-courses/.
[7] See https://www.bundeskunsthalle.de/en/saveland.
[8] See https://grih.info/commitments.

overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that currently define the UNCCD's capacity-building and innovation landscape will inform the broad considerations and strategic orientation for a future strategy.

25. UNCCD's capacity-building agenda has the following strong points:

(a) Strong institutional foundation through Article 19 of the Convention, which explicitly recognizes the importance of capacity-building and mandates international cooperation to support it. This legal basis has been reinforced by COP decisions – such as decisions 1/COP.11, 8/COP.13, and 2/COP.14 – which have progressively expanded the scope of capacity-building activities and embedded them within the Convention's strategic framework;

(b) Demonstrable adaptability in its programming, evidenced by the shift from basic training and reporting support to more sophisticated, inclusive, and digitally-enabled initiatives, including in the context of unforeseen challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. The development of platforms such as the Capacity Building Marketplace, PRAIS, the UNCCD Data Dashboard, and the Drought Toolbox, along with the integration of AI and geospatial tools like Trends.Earth, reflects a growing commitment to innovation and accessibility;

(c) Since COP 13, gender and youth have been mainstreamed into capacity-building programmes with targeted fellowships, training programmes, and policy frameworks such as the Gender Action Plan. Capacity-building integrates gender and youth, with growing emphasis on the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities;

(d) Collaborations with United Nations agencies, development banks, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and technical partners have enabled the secretariat to leverage external expertise and resources. The GM's Project Preparation Partnership, the G20's support for LDN, and the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality Flagship have further expanded the reach and impact of capacity-building initiatives;

(e) The strategic alignment of the UNCCD with the SDGs, particularly SDG target 15.3 on LDN, has greatly enhanced the Convention's policy relevance and catalysed action at multiple levels. Through decision 3/COP.12, Parties were encouraged to establish voluntary LDN targets and integrate them into their national action programmes, creating a direct link between national implementation and SDG monitoring. As a result, most countries have been able to mainstream LDN into their sustainable development agendas;

(f) Clear mandates for mobilizing financial resources and building external partnerships to support capacity-building activities;

(g) A notable strength of the Capacity-Building and Innovation subunit lies in its consistent application of innovative approaches to fulfilling its mandate, notwithstanding constraints in financial and human resources. Notably, and as observed by auditors, the subunit has demonstrated exemplary and highly effective use of internship programmes to augment its capacity and deliver results.

26. Despite these strengths, several internal challenges continue to limit the effectiveness and scalability of Capacity-Building and Innovation efforts, including:

(a) The current lack of a fully operational and adequately resourced Capacity-Building and Innovation unit. Capacity-building and innovation functions, as enshrined in Article 19 and reaffirmed through subsequent judicial decisions, have historically been supported by financial and human resources commensurate with the scope of the mandate. This support enabled the effective discharge of these functions and the implementation of related activities. Despite repeated recognition of the need for such a unit in multiple COP decisions and internal reviews, its implementation remains lacking with the unfilled vacancy for a capacity-building officer. This gap greatly limits the ability of the secretariat to fully meet growing mandates despite available knowledge management systems and structures like the SPI, which offer strong potential for future capacity development;

(b) Fragmented delivery of capacity-building and innovation activities across units and divisions, leading to duplication, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities for synergy.

The absence of a secretariat-wide capacity-building strategy and innovation agenda, including formalized guidelines for scientific and technical collaboration, further exacerbates this fragmentation. There is no formal guide for planning and implementation as each unit implements capacity-building activities deriving from its work programme (e.g. CRIC subunit implements capacity-building related to the reporting process; GM implements capacity-building activities related to resource mobilization, LDN TSP, and LDN transformative projects and programmes, etc.);

(c) An underdeveloped M&E plan for capacity-building activities limits the avenues for improvement and innovation. While platforms like PRAIS and the UNCCD Data Dashboard offer some data on implementation, there is no comprehensive framework for assessing the long-term impact of capacity-building interventions. This limits the secretariat's ability to demonstrate results, adapt programming, and secure sustained support from donors and Parties;

(d) Digital tools, while promising, often face barriers related to language, internet connectivity, and user literacy, particularly in LDCs and SIDS. Without targeted efforts to localize content and build digital capacity, these tools risk reinforcing existing inequalities.

27. The UNCCD has several strategic opportunities to enhance its capacity-building and innovation function:

(a) The global shift towards a digital transformation offers a chance to scale the UNCCD e-Learning Platform, integrate AI and big data analytics, and improve the accessibility and efficiency of training tools. A national reporting platform supported by robust digital and database technology has already been developed, but could be further enhanced in response to advances in digital technologies. As mandated by COP 16, the planned revival and redesign of the Capacity-Building Marketplace and blended learning models are promising steps in this direction;

(b) There is growing momentum for South–South and triangular cooperation to further strengthen peer-to-peer learning, regional centres of excellence, and localized training hubs that can foster context-specific solutions and strengthen regional ownership. These models align well with the Convention's emphasis on inclusivity and decentralization;

(c) The alignment of the UNCCD's goals with other global frameworks – such as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework – creates opportunities for integrated programming, and joint financing and capacity-building. Enhanced collaboration with the CBD and UNFCCC, as encouraged by decision 19/COP.14, can help maximize resource efficiency and policy coherence. For the Rio conventions, the already established JLG provides vast opportunities for achieving synergies;

(d) Increasing private sector, civil society and youth engagement presents new avenues for innovation and co-financing. Community-based organizations can play a critical role to ensure capacity-building efforts are locally grounded and community-responsive.

28. Nevertheless, several external threats could undermine the future strategic orientation:

(a) Political instability and governance weaknesses in some affected countries can disrupt capacity-building initiatives and erode institutional gains. High staff turnover and shifting policy priorities may lead to the loss of trained personnel and institutional memory. Outcomes of the COP negotiations on the UNCCD budget are not previsible, which can be good or bad for capacity-building activities;

(b) Climate change and environmental shocks – such as prolonged droughts and land degradation – are placing increasing pressure on national systems. These challenges can overwhelm existing capacities and necessitate rapid, large-scale responses that current programming may not be equipped to deliver;

(c) Donor fatigue and shifting global priorities do not guarantee long-term financial commitments, which often lead to project-based and unsustainable capacity-building efforts. Economic downturns or geopolitical tensions could further reduce the availability of funding for technical assistance and training. Many UNCCD activities, including for capacity-building, depend on voluntary contributions, which are not predictable in amounts and in time frame;

(d) Without targeted investments in infrastructure and digital literacy, vulnerable populations may be excluded from the benefits of new tools and platforms. This could exacerbate existing inequalities and undermine the Convention's commitment to leaving no one behind;

(e) While COP decisions have laid out ambitious actions, delays in finalizing the capacity-building strategy, innovation agenda, or internal coordination mechanisms pose risks to coherence and delivery;

(f) Without effective promotion, localization, and stakeholder engagement, capacity-building and innovation tools (e.g. Capacity Building Marketplace, UNCCD e-Learning Platform) may remain underutilized.

V. Broad considerations for the future strategic orientation of capacity-building and innovation under the Convention

29. The future of capacity-building and innovation under the UNCCD must evolve beyond traditional training models and embrace a more transformative, inclusive and adaptive approach. Capacity-building and capacity development should no longer be viewed as a one-time intervention, but as an embedded, continual process of learning, institutional strengthening, and innovation. The focus should expand from delivering individual training to building national capacity ecosystems, providing knowledge, skills, tools, structures, and mentorships that create lasting institutional learning and impact.

30. Decentralizing the delivery of capacity-building and innovation activities beyond secretariat leadership is essential. Empowering regional hubs and research institutions specializing in desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) can enable interventions that are context-specific, more culturally relevant, and linguistically appropriate. These institutions could drive training-of-trainer programmes, ensuring knowledge is multiplied and sustained locally, especially in strengthening the engagement and participation of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

31. Digital technology and transformation, especially the integration of AI and geospatial technologies, should become more prominent in the future capacity-building strategy. These tools, together with the required technical capacities and skillsets to effectively use them, offer potential to customize learning, increase accessibility and provide real-time decision support. The UNCCD e-Learning Platform must leverage AI-driven personalization, natural language interfaces, and interactive analytics to deliver more impactful and scalable learning experiences. Blended learning models – combining in-person interaction with advanced digital follow-ups – will remain essential in this transition.

32. To support these ambitions structurally, the UNCCD may consider mobilizing adequate resources to enable the effective implementation of the UNCCD mandate and promote centralized coordination of capacity-building and development as a key cross-cutting function of the Convention. This would harmonize the various related activities currently siloed within the secretariat, the GM, and the G20 GLI into a coordinated entity with a common mandate. Such an institutional realignment would increase internal coherence, eliminate duplication and enable more strategic delivery of services.

33. It is equally vital to re-evaluate how capacity-building performance is measured. The monitoring of capacity-building efforts must move beyond basic activity counts toward tracking meaningful outcomes, such as knowledge application, institutional uptake, and policy influence. A critical but underutilized avenue for advancing capacity-building lies in the UNCCD national reporting process. While currently focused on indicators to track progress towards the UNCCD strategic objectives, national reporting can and should evolve to become a key instrument for capturing, showcasing and learning from countries' capacity-building and innovation efforts. The reporting templates and PRAIS platform should be enhanced to better reflect the investments, strategies, innovations, and partnerships countries are pursuing to build capacity in combating DLDD, whether through digital tools, inclusive policies, integration of Indigenous knowledge, or new institutional arrangements.

34. Such improved reporting would serve multiple purposes: recognizing leadership and innovation, sharing replicable practices across regions, identifying gaps, and informing targeted support. It would also allow for better alignment with the strategic objectives of the Convention and improve the evidence base for decisions taken by the COP. National reports should include dedicated sections on capacity development and innovation, and guidance should be provided to help countries report not just outputs (e.g. number of trainings), but outcomes and impact (e.g. institutional change, local adoption, policy shifts).

35. Science is a key pathway to advance capacity-building. A significant opportunity lies in mainstreaming science into society, especially in how the SPI outputs are utilized. The SPI produces high-quality, policy-relevant science, yet its uptake beyond expert audiences remains limited. The SPI's findings must be translated into user-friendly formats, such as infographics, short videos, podcasts, policy briefs in plain language, and interactive digital tools. These formats should be disseminated through the various media channels, knowledge hubs, and public awareness campaigns to support broader societal understanding and engagement with critical land and climate science. In this way, science becomes not just a resource for negotiators, but a living tool for public action and behavioural change.

36. A strong opportunity still lies in deepening synergies with the other Rio conventions. The overlapping and mutually complementary thematic mandates of CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC provide fertile ground for joint capacity-building initiatives. By developing integrated training modules on cross-cutting issues such as ecosystem-based approaches, sustainable finance, land tenure, and gender-responsive policy, the three conventions can support Parties more holistically. The JLG offers an existing platform to turn this vision into practice.

37. Ultimately, the UNCCD must aim to become the global hub for DLDD-related capacity-building as the leading provider of inclusive, technology-enabled, and impact-driven learning services for LDN and drought resilience.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

38. Since the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 23) is an intersessional session and therefore not producing draft decision text, this section of the report highlights key points and proposals for Parties' consideration. Following the adoption of the final report of CRIC 23, draft decision text on this agenda item will be prepared in time for CRIC 24.

39. The evolving capacity-building landscape of the UNCCD reflects notable achievements alongside enduring structural limitations. Over the past decade, the Convention has advanced inclusive, technology-enabled, and cross-sectoral capacity development, yet progress is constrained by historic and consistent lack of adequate resources, fragmented institutional arrangements, limited coordination and lack of political will. The absence of a unified strategy and underuse of monitoring systems have further hindered scalability and impact.

40. To ensure the long-term effectiveness and relevance of its capacity-building function, the UNCCD must adopt a more strategic, integrated, and forward-looking orientation. Capacity-building and capacity development should be recognized as an enabler of transformative change, not only in achieving LDN in the context of national action programmes as per decision 3/COP.12, but also in advancing the Convention's broader strategic objectives. It must be designed as a dynamic, adaptive process rooted in national and regional realities, informed by scientific knowledge, and responsive to emerging environmental and sociopolitical challenges.

41. The future of capacity-building under the UNCCD must strive to be transformative, inclusive, and systemically embedded within national and global development frameworks. This underscores the need for the development of the post-2030 strategic framework of the Convention to proceed in parallel with the formulation of the capacity-building and innovation strategy so as to avoid the premature adoption of the latter and the risk of rendering some of its elements obsolete after 2030. By

consolidating institutional structures, embracing innovation, and fostering deeper stakeholder engagement, the Convention can position itself as a global leader in enabling the capacities required to combat DLDD in a changing world.

42. The following are broad recommendations for priority areas to guide the future orientation of capacity-building under the Convention:

(a) Strategic realignment: Develop and operationalize a comprehensive capacity-building strategy that fully aligns with and continuously adapts to the Convention's strategic framework, incorporates emerging global agendas, and articulates a coherent vision for long-term institutional and human capacity development. To that end, a follow-up comprehensive needs assessments should be undertaken in time for COP 18 that will further inform the processes towards 2030;

(b) Institutional consolidation: Entrust a dedicated, adequately resourced and fully staffed capacity-building unit within the secretariat to serve as the central coordinating entity for all capacity-building-related activities across the secretariat, the GM, and associated initiatives, as well as Convention partners. This unit should possess multidisciplinary expertise and a clear mandate to oversee design, implementation, monitoring, and strategic partnerships;

(c) Decentralized delivery: Strengthen regional and national implementation mechanisms by supporting the establishment of regional hubs and institutes of excellence. These structures should facilitate context-specific knowledge exchange through localized and community-based learning systems and platforms, and may also have the ability to mobilize their own resources for capacity-building activities;

(d) Digital and scientific integration: Further expand the use of advanced digital tools, including AI and geospatial technologies, to enhance learning personalization, accessibility, and decision support. In parallel, the Convention should improve the accessibility and public dissemination of scientific outputs, particularly those produced by the SPI, through simplified formats and easily communicable content tailored to diverse audiences;

(e) Monitoring for impact: Reform the current basic M&E approach to move beyond activity tracking toward impact-oriented assessment. Endeavor to develop or identify, among other things, progress indicators that capture institutional change, behavioural shifts, and policy outcomes. Enhance national reporting mechanisms – particularly through PRAIS – to reflect capacity-building progress, challenges, and innovations;

(f) Cross-convention synergies: Leverage the JLG of the Rio conventions to develop integrated capacity-building initiatives focused on common thematic areas such as ecosystem-based approaches, sustainable finance, and resilience planning. Promote coordinated training modules, shared platforms, and joint funding;

(g) Enabling of partnerships and innovation: Enhance strategic partnerships and networking by fostering stronger collaboration with Parties, Convention institutions, regional centres, civil society, academia, and the private sector. Establish structured platforms to facilitate peer-to-peer learning, knowledge co-creation, and the joint delivery of capacity-building initiatives. Encourage innovation by integrating pilot initiatives, adaptive learning approaches, and co-financed models that can be scaled up and replicated across regions.

43. The future strategic orientation of the capacity-building framework and innovation agenda should move in concert with the post-2030 strategic framework of the UNCCD. The two frameworks would benefit from being adaptive and capable of co-evolving in response to emerging demands and dynamic shifts in global environmental issues, thus ensuring the effective implementation of the Convention in addressing the threats of DLDD.