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

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

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Decision 4/COP.16 requested the Convention institutions to enhance the functionality of the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS) for the 2026 reporting process. Furthermore, in decision 2/COP.16, Parties requested the secretariat, together with data providers, financial and technical partners, and the Earth Observation community to continue supporting country capacity development to monitor the implementation of the Convention.

This document highlights all elements of reporting that have been updated, amended or improved in response to these decisions.

It 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.



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I. Introduction

1. The 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which was adopted by Parties at the thirteenth session of the Conference of Parties (COP 13), requires Parties to report on five strategic objectives (SOs) and an implementation framework. Progress made in the implementation of the Strategic Framework has been regularly reviewed through the national reporting process since 2018, and every four years thereafter, in line with the reporting frequency adopted in decision 15/COP.13.
2. In decision 4/COP.16, Parties requested the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM), subject to available resources, to enhance the functionality of the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS) for the upcoming 2026 UNCCD reporting process.
3. In the same decision, Parties also invited Conservation International (CI) to continue enhancing Trends.Earth, by addressing the critical technical issues raised during the 2022 UNCCD reporting process as a priority. Furthermore, Parties requested the secretariat, in collaboration with data providers, financial and technical partners and the Earth Observation community, including the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality (GEO-LDN) Flagship initiative, to ensure that default data is accurate, complete, consistent, scientifically reviewed, documented and, where feasible and optimal, based on continuously available high-resolution data products for the land surface, especially for small island developing States (SIDS) and developing countries without adequate data.
4. In decision 2/COP.16, Parties requested the secretariat, in collaboration with data providers, financial and technical partners, and the Earth Observation community, including the GEO-LDN Flagship initiative, to support developing countries – particularly SIDS and least developed countries – by providing capacity development for participatory land degradation mapping, target setting and drought assessments; facilitating blended learning for national reporting through e-learning and in-person training; promoting South–South, North–South and Triangular cooperation to exchange experiences; enhancing collaboration with regional bodies to offer technical and data support during the 2026 reporting process; and offering technical and financial assistance to help maximize the use of national data for reporting.
5. This document provides information on how the secretariat, the GM and their partners responded to the requests and invitations made by the COP in decisions 4/COP.16 and 2/COP.16, and improved the reporting process and tools in preparation for the 2026 reporting process, scheduled to commence in August 2025 with the launch of the updated PRAIS reporting platform (PRAIS4). It also provides information on the use of the enabling funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to support the reporting process.
6. The document contains some conclusions and recommendations for consideration by the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention at its twenty-third session (CRIC 23).

II. Reporting platform and data analytics tools

A. The reporting infrastructure

7. A next-generation online PRAIS platform was developed for the 2022 reporting process to enable national reporting with geospatial information, improve data entry and map visualization, and report review and revision functionalities. Building on the experiences and lessons learned from the 2022 reporting process, the redesign and implementation of PRAIS for 2026 reporting was done with the following objectives in mind:

(a) **Quality Assurance:** to ensure that national reports are comprehensive, internally consistent, aligned with UNCCD guidelines and well-integrated, the platform should implement robust validation rules. These rules should serve as quality control

mechanisms to verify the accuracy, completeness and coherence of submitted data before it is used by the secretariat in aggregate reports and derivative information products;

(b) Transparency: the platform should enable access to all necessary documentation for understanding how the indicators should be reported, including explanations of key terms, default data sources, definitions and methodologies used;

(c) Ease of use: the platform should have an intuitive interface with an overview country management dashboard and forms allowing easy data entry, switching between national and default data sources, and the upload of other datasets and/or documentation;

(d) Improved communication: the platform should have a transparent review and revision functionality which allows changes to be tracked in the reported figures and facilitates understanding of the review process flow;

(e) Flexibility: the platform should clearly outline the differentiated reporting obligations of affected country Parties and developed country Parties while giving countries the flexibility to adjust the indicators they report – e.g. by choosing to report on optional indicators or indicators generally considered not applicable to their country category;

(f) Simplicity: the reporting forms have been simplified to the extent possible, e.g. by removing non-essential tables and limiting reporting to key years necessary to capture the baseline and reporting periods;

(g) Storytelling: Parties are encouraged to provide more narrative information and stories on their national and regional situations. Additional comment fields have been added after many of the reporting tables to facilitate this while a new and improved Implementation Framework expands the breadth of information Parties can report in narrative format;

(h) Integrity: to uphold the integrity and reliability of national reporting, all tables utilizing geospatially derived data should be systematically linked to their original spatial data sources. This linkage allows Parties to submit geospatial information and accompanying maps that are fully aligned with the numerical data presented in their reports. Such integration strengthens the traceability, consistency and credibility of the data used to inform policy decisions and international commitments.

8. The PRAIS platform has been simplified and improved through, inter alia: (i) the creation of a country overview dashboard for the management of the submission process, including individual form status and progress tracking of report completion; (ii) more user roles and privileges; (iii) an embedded chat application with opportunities for users to create chat groups and forums for peer-to-peer learning and exchanges with other PRAIS users on specific reporting topics; (iv) revised quality assurance based on the correction of validation errors; (v) form annotations for easier navigation of the reporting workflow by affected and developed country Parties; (vi) auto-generated notifications for users on report review comments; (vii) the ability to switch between default and national data sources per table; and (viii) clearer documentation of metadata. Parties may also mark a form as not applicable. Non-applicable forms will not be published in the final report.

9. Access to the PRAIS platform is exclusive to national reporting officers and their collaborators. National reporting officers will be provided with access to their country's reporting workspace in order to begin completing reporting tables. They can also invite additional collaborators to participate in the reporting process through a self-administered system for adding new users.

10. In order to facilitate the reporting process, especially for countries where national data and information is limited or not available, the PRAIS platform provides access to geospatial data from global remote sensing products as well as statistical data from other sources; this data is known as 'default data'. Further information on the default data available to countries for the 2026 reporting process is contained in section III of this document.

11. PRAIS is not a standalone platform but to be envisioned as the core component of a wider reporting infrastructure that includes the UNCCD Data Dashboard¹ and the LDN

¹ See <https://data.unccd.int/>.

Target Tracking Tool as well as third-party software tools that enable countries to prepare their indicator datasets. The Dashboard currently hosts the 2022 reported data but will be updated with the 2026 reported data in due course.

12. The Tracking Tool,² developed with support from the European Commission, consolidates the latest information on all national voluntary LDN targets and other targets relevant to SO 1 in one place. It has been used to prefill the SO 1 Voluntary Targets section of the PRAIS platform with previously reported targets and their associated implemented actions. Parties have the option to resubmit, revise or delete previously reported targets prior to the submission of their 2026 national report. Changes, updates or additions to the pre-filled information on these targets will supersede the existing information and be considered official once submitted.

13. It is essential that this reporting infrastructure be supported by robust digital and database technology, ensuring that the Convention institutions, Parties and partners can access up-to-date reported information at the touch of a button. Therefore, this reporting infrastructure will continue to co-evolve with the UNCCD's wider digitalization strategy, under the auspices of the United Nations 2.0 initiative, while meeting the demands of the reporting process. These efforts contribute to the five pillars of the United Nations 2.0 vision for a data-driven United Nations system:

- (a) Data: the reporting infrastructure ensures open and equitable access to nearly 60 geospatial and thematic data layers for all countries, supporting informed decision-making;
- (b) Digital: each country benefits from a dedicated, secure digital space hosted in an online cloud environment, facilitating centralized and streamlined reporting processes;
- (c) Foresight: the availability of nationally reported data empowers countries to make evidence-based decisions on tackling desertification, land degradation and drought;
- (d) Behaviour: the tangible benefits of data-driven reporting foster a cultural shift among Parties, encouraging continuous learning and capacity development;
- (e) Innovation: the reporting infrastructure continues to expand as new tools are developed and 'plugged-in' using open standards.

14. The infrastructure will be sustained accordingly for the remainder of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and beyond. The system is flexible and adaptable and will be adjusted following changes resulting from either the outcome of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework or any decision Parties may take on the monitoring and reporting framework following COP 17.

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

15. The CI Foundation has upgraded the Trends.Earth software³ in order to support the 2026 UNCCD reporting process. Among other work, CI has enhanced and improved the software as required by Parties, including conducting a review of the default data, software features and functionalities available to country Parties for reporting to ensure they are fit for purpose.

16. Based on work outlined in a Letter of Agreement between the UNCCD secretariat and CI, and co-funded by the European Union, CI has also been conducting a feasibility study for an LDN target planning tool capable of analysing and tracking the co-benefits of LDN targets with customized geospatial tool functionality. This feasibility study is informing an Enabling Activity project under the seventh replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-7), titled 'Integrating LDN into land use planning frameworks to strengthen national UNCCD enabling environments' (see section V, C of this document).

² See <https://ldntargets.unccd.int/>.

³ See <https://docs.trends.earth/en/latest/>.

17. In collaboration with the GEO-LDN Flagship, CI is also developing methodologies to identify and map areas vulnerable to land degradation under various climate scenarios, as well as areas showing improvement resulting from restoration efforts. This work directly responds to decision 20/COP.15 and aims to support countries in considering the potential impacts of climate change alongside land management decisions, thereby enabling more targeted planning and response strategies for achieving LDN. To support this initiative, an expert workshop was held on 29–30 April 2025 in Bonn, Germany to provide guidance on thematic refinement and ensure the methodologies are applicable to a wide range of user groups. The final report, incorporating the insights and recommendations from the workshop, is expected to be completed in September 2025.

18. The secretariat is also collaborating with other technical partners on new tools that can form part of the emerging ecosystem of tools for national reporting. These include:

(a) The Land Cover Comparison Tool for SIDS,⁴ jointly developed by Apacheta and the Partnership Initiative on Sustainable Land Management (PISLM). This interactive tool allows users to visualize and analyse land cover changes over the 2000–2023 period in SIDS that are Party to the UNCCD. It provides area-based statistics, transition matrices, and spatial comparisons between different land cover datasets to support evidence-based decision-making and the 2026 reporting process;

(b) The Land Productivity Dynamics (LPD) Comparison Tool for SIDS⁵ jointly developed by Apacheta, PISLM and CI. This application was designed to enable the exploration of two high-spatial-resolution land productivity datasets by allowing easy comparison in order to choose the dataset that best fits local conditions. These two datasets are explained further in section III, A;

(c) The LPD Real-Time Tool⁶ for SIDS was created by Apacheta, PISLM and CI for SIDS that wish to make their own LPD dataset at a spatial resolution of 30 m by customizing the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations–World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (FAO-WOCAT) algorithm used for LPD calculations and adapting the models to local conditions.

C. Harnessing open data to strengthen reporting synergies

19. Interoperability and synergies in information exchange between the three Rio conventions and other United Nations reporting processes is only possible when data can be legally, confidently and consistently reused across systems. This requires reuse conditions that are both explicit and standardized. To this end, the UNCCD secretariat is collaborating with the Creative Commons (CC), an international nonprofit organization dedicated to helping build and sustain a thriving knowledge base, under the auspices of implementing the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Data Management Principles. CC empowers individuals and communities around the world through technical, legal and policy solutions that enable the sharing of education, culture, and science in the public interest. CC has made available a suite of licences⁷ that give every person and organization in the world a free, simple and standardized way of granting copyright permissions for creative and academic works, ensuring proper attribution, and enabling others to copy, distribute and make use of these works.

20. As in the 2022 reporting process, the UNCCD secretariat continues to apply the CC Attribution-Non-Commercial (CC BY-NC) licence by default to submitted national reports. However, in order to maximize the reuse, interoperability and impact of data and information in national reports, all Parties are encouraged to adopt a more open licence: either the CC Universal Public Domain Dedication 1.0 (CC0) or the most open CC Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY) licence. While the CC0 public domain dedication enables unrestricted

⁴ See <https://apacheta.projects.earthengine.app/view/compare-lct-sids> and <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15276250>.

⁵ See <https://apacheta.projects.earthengine.app/view/compare-lpd-sids>.

⁶ See <https://apacheta.projects.earthengine.app/view/lpd-realtime-sids>.

⁷ See <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/licenses/>.

reuse without the need for attribution, either of these options will ensure national data can be legally, confidently and consistently reused across systems. Ultimately this will result in improved tracking of global and regional status and trends in land degradation and drought, and greater opportunities for synergies among conventions through seamless data sharing.

21. The UNCCD secretariat is already ensuring synergies in national reporting by making use of open data standards. Data for four SDG indicators, as contained in the United Nations Statistics Division SDG Global Database,⁸ namely SDG indicators 1.1.1, 6.1.1, 15.1.2 and 15.5.1, have been synchronized with the PRAIS platform using the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange standard, which provides a framework and technical standards for the exchange of statistical data and metadata among organizations and systems. This ensures that Parties have access to the most recently reported national data for these SDG indicators in the PRAIS and that this data can be automatically updated if and when new estimates become available in the SDG Global Database. This approach reduces the reporting burden and prevents duplication of data validation efforts by Parties.

III. Improvements to the modalities of reporting

A. Strategic objectives 1–5

22. Following feedback received from Parties and technical partners after the 2022 reporting process, the secretariat and WOCAT, based at the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Bern, Switzerland, in collaboration with technical partners, have published an addendum to version 2 of the Good Practice Guidance for SDG Indicator 15.3.1.⁹ The addendum provides detailed guidance for national reporting officers, researchers and software developers working with SDG Indicator 15.3.1 and LDN. It is divided into three main sections. The first offers refined guidance on combining data across multiple reporting periods, enabling consistent tracking of land degradation and improvement since the baseline. The second provides guidance for assessing progress toward LDN, introducing a retrospective, spatially explicit method to evaluate whether degradation has been offset by actual improvements in the same land type. The third provides guidance for selecting and verifying data related to land cover, productivity and soil organic carbon (SOC), introduces tools and workflows for dataset comparison and verification, and promotes the integration of national data and expertise. Overall, the addendum aims to make national land degradation reporting more reliable, transparent and policy-relevant.

23. The secretariat is pursuing a two-tier approach to the provision of default data for SDG Indicator 15.3.1 to Parties for 2026 national reporting: (i) all Parties will receive access to moderate-resolution (250 m–1 km) default data through PRAIS, and (ii) SIDS will also be granted access to high-spatial-resolution (30 m) default datasets through third-party applications such as Trends.Earth and other tools, on a case by case basis. Given the challenges associated with the second tier of high-spatial-resolution default data in terms of computational expense, large cloud storage requirements and multi-actor processing chain complexity, they will not be available in PRAIS itself. However, SIDS will be able to report SDG Indicator 15.3.1 using geospatial information at high spatial resolution using the upload functions provided in PRAIS.

24. The secretariat, in collaboration with relevant data providers, has made available updated default datasets at moderate resolution in preparation for the 2026 reporting process, consistent with the methodological guidelines outlined in the Good Practice Guidance on SDG Indicator 15.3.1, and its addendum, the Good Practice Guidance for National Reporting on SO 3 and other relevant methodological notes.¹⁰ Five moderate-resolution EO-derived

⁸ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>.

⁹ See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/manuals-and-guides/addendum-good-practice-guidance-sdg-indicator-1531-proportion-land>.

¹⁰ See <https://www.unccd.int/data-knowledge/unccd-national-reporting-process>.

default datasets have been updated¹¹ while three additional moderate-resolution EO-derived alternative datasets will be made available to Parties through CI's Trends.Earth software.¹² More specifically:

(a) The WorldPop global data set on population distributions, demographics and dynamics is in the process of being updated by the School of Geography and Environmental Sciences at the University of Southampton, United Kingdom. While the new 2015–2030 global demographic datasets offer potential improvements over the 2000–2020 versions, they were in beta format when the 2026 reporting process began and will not therefore be used as default data. Beta datasets are excluded from official reporting due to potential inconsistencies, errors and incomplete information which can compromise data reliability. The 2000–2020 WorldPop dataset, used as a source of default data for 2022 reporting, will be made available to Parties for the 2026 reporting process. As it has not been updated post–2020, the final three years (2021, 2022 and 2023) will duplicate values for 2020. As soon as the final WorldPop 2015–2023 data is published, Parties will be able to download the pre-calculated indicator dataset from Trends.Earth and import it into PRAIS to replace the default data;

(b) Since the previous dataset (Global Precipitation Climatology Centre) used for calculating the Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) ends in 2020, the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology has created the Global Multi-Index Drought dataset. This new dataset includes the SPI and the Standardized Precipitation Evapotranspiration Index (SPEI), based on global rainfall and climate data from 1980 to 2023, at a spatial resolution of 10 km. SPI remains the preferred index for reporting on indicator SO 3-1. However, in arid and semi-arid regions with low and irregular rainfall, countries may choose to use the SPEI instead, available via the Trends.Earth tool.

25. The secretariat has been collaborating with the community of Earth Observation data providers to make available land surface datasets at a spatial resolution of 30 m from 2000 onwards to support national reporting to the UNCCD, especially for SIDS. The status and readiness of these datasets for 2026 national reporting are summarized per sub-indicator as follows:

(a) Land Cover: two global high-spatial-resolution land cover datasets suitable for UNCCD reporting are currently available: i) the 30 m Global Land Cover and Land Use Change Dataset¹³ for 2000–2020 from the Global Land Analysis and Discovery (GLAD) laboratory at the University of Maryland, United States of America; and ii) the 30 m global land cover dynamic monitoring product with fine classification system (GLC-FCS30D) for 1985–2022 from Zhang et al. (2021). These two datasets are available for use by SIDS through the dedicated comparison tool described in section 2, B of this document. However, both datasets have known limitations. The GLAD dataset is only available in five-year intervals from 2000 to 2020, and its geographic coverage is incomplete for some SIDS. It includes 110 distinct land cover classes which require aggregation into a smaller number of classes and further cross-mapping onto the seven UNCCD classes to make them suitable for use in national reports. The GLC-FCS30D product offers annual data from 2000 to 2022 but, like GLAD, its coverage for SIDS is incomplete, and it maps approximately 10 million fewer hectares than GLAD in SIDS. Its classification system distinguishes 16 global and 14 additional regional land cover classes, which also require cross-mapping onto the UNCCD seven classes for national reporting. A detailed comparison of these two products, published by Apacheta and PISLM,¹⁴ found that 17 SIDS have partial or no coverage in one or both of

¹¹ These are: (i) Climate Change Initiative Land Cover of the European Space Agency; (ii) Trends.Earth Land Productivity Dynamics; (iii) Soil Organic Carbon stock changes based on SoilGrids250m of the International Soil Reference and Information Centre; (iv) WorldPop global data set on population distributions, demographics and dynamics; and (v) The Global Multi-Index Drought dataset of the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology.

¹² These are: (i) Land Productivity Dynamics of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission; (ii) Land Productivity Dynamics of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT); and (iii) Climate Hazards Center InfraRed Precipitation with Station data (CHIRPS).

¹³ See <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/remote-sensing/articles/10.3389/frsen.2022.856903/full>.

¹⁴ See <https://zenodo.org/records/15276251>.

the datasets, suggesting that these SIDS will require a bespoke solution for access to high-spatial-resolution land cover information for national reporting;

(b) Land Productivity: CI, PISLM, Apacheta and the International Research Centre of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals (CBAS) have co-created new land productivity dynamics (LPD) datasets at high spatial resolution (30 m) for the 2000–2023 period. From a Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) time series derived from Landsat data, two LPD datasets have been produced using the FAO–WOCAT v2 algorithm: ML30-LPD¹⁵ and HiLPD-SIDS,^{16, 17} which cover the three relevant periods for 2026 reporting: the baseline period (2000–2015), the first reporting period (2016–2019) and the current reporting period (2016–2023). Nevertheless, gaps will remain in these datasets for some islands, especially for the baseline period for which Landsat images are sparse in time. Parties should explore the datasets for each SIDS carefully in the LPD Comparison Tool before deciding whether they are fit for purpose for national reporting;

(c) SOC: version 1 of the new high-spatial-resolution (30 m) global soil carbon open access database,^{18,19} produced by the OpenGeoHub Foundation and the Netherlands Space Office (NSO) and funded by the Open-Earth-Monitor Cyberinfrastructure²⁰ and the Land & Carbon Lab²¹ projects, contains global soil carbon density, soil carbon content, pH, texture fractions, bulk density and soil types (United States Department of Agriculture subgroups) from 2000 to 2022. The dataset comprises predictions of soil properties at 30 m resolution with uncertainty estimates and at multiple depths (0–30 cm, 30–60 cm and 60–100 cm) but is only available for download for 2000–2005 and 2020–2022 due to cloud storage limitations and the extent of the dataset. Complete global 30 m resolution mosaics are available via the Google Earth Engine.²² The dataset relies on historical Landsat imagery to underpin predictions of soil carbon. As this imagery offers only partial coverage for some SIDS, there are gaps in predicted SOC values.²³ Where imagery is sparse or absent, SOC predictions will be absent or subject to high uncertainty. Therefore, this dataset should be handled with caution and carefully examined before a Party decides to use it in its national reporting.

26. In the PRAIS platform, several enhancements have been introduced to streamline and improve the reporting process under SO 1-4. Parties now have the option to upload up to five regional land cover transition matrices, enabling a more accurate reflection of regional and local land dynamics. In addition, countries may stratify land productivity and SOC stock indicators using their own national or customized land cover classifications, offering a flexible alternative to the seven default UNCCD land cover classes. The SO 1 forms in the PRAIS platform now also support the reporting of land improvement in addition to land degradation, providing valuable insights in the context of achieving LDN. To further reduce reporting burdens and avoid duplicative data validation, default data for relevant SDG indicators used to measure progress towards SO 2 and 4 have been imported directly from the SDG Global Database and synchronized with PRAIS.

27. The GM has worked on further strengthening the reporting system for SO 5 in line with the feedback received from country Parties during the reporting cycle and at CRIC 22 in order to improve data comparability and coverage, transparency and clarity of reporting. Key efforts include: (i) refining the reporting template to better capture issues such as the tracking of domestic resources and the assessment of financial needs; (ii) improving the availability and quality of default quantitative data for progress indicators related to bilateral resources, domestic public funding and private sector contributions; and (iii) further developing complementary tools, including the Good Practice Guidance for National

¹⁵ See <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15276519>.

¹⁶ See <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15862965>.

¹⁷ See <https://doi.org/10.12237/casearth.686dc91f24e15709b381ae4e>.

¹⁸ See <https://essd.copernicus.org/preprints/essd-2025-336/>.

¹⁹ See <https://github.com/openlandmap/soildb>.

²⁰ See <https://doi.org/10.3030/101059548>.

²¹ See <https://landcarbonlab.org/>.

²² See <https://code.earthengine.google.com/?asset=projects/global-pasture-watch/assets/gsm-30>.

²³ See https://assets-eu.researchsquare.com/files/rs-4465582/v1_covered_7bb1f572-3825-4552-bf7f-d8a5010d8942.pdf?c=1716519711.

Reporting on SO 5,²⁴ the reporting manual and glossary, and self-paced videos showing the step-by-step process of entering information in the reporting template.

B. Implementation framework

28. The implementation framework within the PRAIS platform for the 2026 national reporting process has been revised to improve clarity and usability, building on continuous feedback from Parties and lessons learned from the 2022 reporting cycle. Despite repeated efforts to enhance this component in previous cycles, an AI-driven analysis of the 2022 narrative reports revealed that the submitted information lacked sufficient structure and relevance for inclusion in the official documentation for CRIC 21.

29. To address both the suboptimal quality of information and the relatively low reporting rates from Parties, the implementation framework will not be presented as a standalone section in the 2026 national reporting cycle. Instead, its elements will be integrated into the appropriate sections under each SO. Internal consultations within the secretariat have further identified potential overlaps between questions in the implementation framework and the data required under individual SOs. Consequently, the three core components of the framework – (i) Financial and Non-Financial Resources; (ii) Policies and Planning; and (iii) Actions on the Ground – have been reviewed and restructured to align with the most relevant SOs. Additionally, elements of gender through the involvement of women and the engagement of youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities can be reported on, where relevant.

30. Despite these enhancements, the current design of PRAIS does not fully capture field-level Sustainable Land Management (SLM) practices as a key element of the implementation framework, or demonstrate their contributions to achieving LDN targets. The reporting of SLM good practices remains optional, generalized and lacks critical detail regarding practice objectives, location, effectiveness, scalability and alignment with the LDN response hierarchy (avoid, reduce, reverse). To address these limitations and strengthen the UNCCD implementation framework, WOCAT proposes a more integrated and automated reporting approach for consideration in future reporting processes. Central to this enhancement would be the establishment of a direct application programming interface (API) linkage between PRAIS and the WOCAT Global SLM Database – the UNCCD-designated reference database for SLM best practices. This connection would enable Parties to seamlessly retrieve and report standardized, validated SLM practices already documented in WOCAT, including newly added or updated entries, ensuring consistency and verifiability across reports. By embedding structured data fields, such as the main objectives of the technology, into PRAIS, the system would more effectively align reported practices with national LDN targets and clarify their placement within the avoid, reduce, reverse LDN hierarchy. Additionally, countries would be able to provide supplementary information tailored to UNCCD reporting needs, such as the current extent and scaling potential of selected practices across various ecological and administrative levels. This would improve understanding of the relevance, adaptability and transformative potential of SLM interventions. Further integration with other UNCCD knowledge platforms, such as the UNCCD–WOCAT gender tool, Drought Toolbox and Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox, could enhance multidimensional reporting and reflect the cross-cutting contributions of SLM practices to gender equality, climate resilience and ecosystem health. Such interoperability would facilitate comparative analysis, foster mutual learning among Parties and strengthen PRAIS as a global knowledge platform for evidence-based decision-making and planning in support of LDN.

²⁴ See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/manuals-and-guides/good-practice-guidance-national-reporting-unccd-strategic-objective-5>.

IV. Capacity-building for reporting

31. In line with decision 2/COP.16, capacity-building for the 2026 reporting process will be delivered with the financial support of the GEF in a hybrid format blending both in-person and online approaches.

32. The suite of capacity-building tools and activities provided to Parties for the 2026 reporting process will comprise training sessions, workshops, manuals and tutorials. They will incorporate recent updates and improvements on the tools and default data sets, and include dimensions on gender, local communities and Indigenous Peoples, where relevant.

A. E-learning materials

33. For the 2026 national reporting process, the suite of e-learning video tutorials, manuals, and guides – originally developed during the 2022 cycle in response to COVID-19 – will be updated to continue offering on-demand technical support. With the hybrid capacity-building model adopted by Parties, the updated and enhanced digital resources will be combined with in-person training delivered through regional capacity-building workshops, thereby maximizing technical support opportunities.

34. The reporting manual provides step-by-step methodological guidance for the preparation of national reports, encompassing all SOs and associated indicators/metrics.²⁵ Upgrades to the reporting manual for the 2026 reporting process include the descriptions of the methodological updates for the assessment and calculations of the indicators under each SO using default data or national data, as well as structural changes in PRAIS to update and modify the tables and forms.

35. The e-learning video tutorials are envisioned to go hand-in-hand with the updated reporting manual, further demonstrating the steps to report in PRAIS for each indicator. Updates are planned for the 16 videos prepared for 2022 reporting,²⁶ and will be produced in all United Nations languages.

B. Technical backstopping

36. In line with decision 2/COP.16, which calls for strengthened collaboration with regional institutions, initiatives and organizations, some regional institutions will be engaged in supporting the 2026 UNCCD reporting process on a pilot basis. This initiative aims to enhance the range and quality of technical services available to Parties by mobilizing regional institutions with proven expertise in land degradation and drought monitoring as ‘one-stop service centres’ for reporting at the regional or subregional level. To further strengthen synergies in reporting across the Rio conventions, the initiative also seeks, where feasible, to engage regional institutions that are part of the technical and scientific cooperation mechanism established by the Convention on Biological Diversity to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.²⁷ By adopting a decentralized model, the initiative will leverage regional knowledge, foster the development of national and regional capacities, and contribute to a more robust, inclusive and efficient UNCCD reporting system.

37. CBAS, the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification, PISLM, the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development, and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory have already confirmed their interest. Consultations with additional regional institutions are ongoing. A limited number of additional international technical experts will be contracted to ensure coverage across all regional implementation annexes of the UNCCD. Together, the regional centres and individual experts will form the technical backstopping team for the 2026 reporting process.

²⁵ See <https://prais4-reporting-manual.unccd.int/en/latest/index.html>.

²⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvHxVdUZAq0CGTq-otlPTcjUX50oz9g9>.

²⁷ See <https://www.cbd.int/tsc/tscm>.

38. A Training of Trainers workshop, attended by technical partners and the technical backstopping team, will encompass preparations for regional capacity-building workshops and discuss workshop modalities as well as improvements to the training materials. This will ensure that the teams delivering the workshops and providing technical support to Parties are as well prepared as possible to guide Parties and troubleshoot or explain any errors or unexpected results that may arise in the data and tools.

39. In addition to facilitating the regional capacity-building workshops, the technical backstopping team will support countries through a helpdesk system, bilateral virtual meetings, subregional webinars and an in-built PRAIS functionality for technical review, ensuring the quality of submitted national reports.

40. Dedicated support will be provided to SIDS to assist them in evaluating the suitability of the new high-spatial-resolution datasets referenced in section III, A of this document. This support will include guidance on selecting the most appropriate datasets for national reporting, processing them using third-party software solutions, and uploading the finalized data to the PRAIS system.

C. Regional capacity-building workshops

41. Under the Global Support Programme IV (GSP IV – see section V, B of this document), provisions to support the organization and facilitation of five regional capacity-building workshops are proposed for the 2026 reporting process for affected country Parties belonging to regional implementation annexes. Given that the GSP IV programme remains under consideration by the GEF at the time of writing, the numbers of regional capacity-building workshops are tentative.

42. The regional capacity-building workshops will be organized in collaboration with host governments for all implementation annexes. The workshops are expected to commence in the first and possibly second quarter of 2026, preceded by the Training of Trainers workshop. Separate workshops are proposed for English-speaking countries in Annex I (Africa), French-speaking countries in Annex I (Africa), Annex II (Asia), a workshop for Parties in the Pacific, and Annex III (Latin America and the Caribbean). Parties from Annex IV (Northern Mediterranean) and Annex V (Central and Eastern Europe), some Parties from Annex II (Central Asia), and developed country Parties not belonging to a regional implementation annex will be grouped together to ensure a balanced number of participants among all workshops. Additionally, a separate regional capacity-building workshop for Arabic-speaking countries from Annex I and Annex II will be organized in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in collaboration with the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification, as one of the regional centres for reporting.

43. One representative from each GEF eligible Party will be funded, ideally the national focal point or reporting officer (acknowledging that this may or may not be the same individual).

D. South–South and other international cooperation

44. In decision 2/COP.16, Parties requested the secretariat, together with data providers, financial and technical partners and the Earth Observation community, including the GEO-LDN Flagship initiative, to facilitate South–South, North-South and Triangular cooperation to share experiences, challenges and lessons learned related to national reporting.

45. The Scenarios for Integrated Land Use Planning (S4ILUP) initiative, in collaboration with the UNCCD, the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative, WOCAT, the FAO and the GEO-LDN Flagship launched a series of global and regional dialogue fora beginning in 2022 to enhance integrated land use planning (ILUP) as a strategic instrument for achieving LDN and advancing the Rio conventions and SDGs. These fora, held virtually and in person across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Pacific engaged over 307 participants from 24 countries and brought together intersectoral country teams, data providers and tool developers to foster collaboration, build capacity and promote the use of

geospatial tools curated in the LDN Toolbox.²⁸ Activities included peer-to-peer learning, technical training and the development of country-specific roadmaps and action plans. GEO-LDN supported the establishment of a global community of practice, facilitating knowledge exchange at national, regional and global levels. A transparent, criteria-based selection process ensured participation from countries eligible for Official Development Assistance, with ongoing support provided between fora to advance national LDN use cases and enhance coordination among stakeholders for UNCCD reporting.

46. SIDS face unique challenges in monitoring land degradation and drought, including limited land area, fragile ecosystems and high vulnerability to climate variability. These are exacerbated by serious constraints in data availability, human resources, institutional capacity and financing. Strengthening data systems and technical capacity is essential, but often beyond the reach of individual SIDS. In this context, regional agencies play a vital role by providing technical support and facilitating knowledge transfer, including training, the provision of custom data and access to remote sensing tools. They also enable resource pooling, such as shared data platforms, joint procurement of equipment, and multi-country early warning systems, allowing SIDS to benefit from economies of scale and coordinated action. These partnerships are critical to building resilient, cost-effective and sustainable monitoring systems tailored to the needs of SIDS. Reflecting this collaborative spirit, the first-ever dedicated SIDS Pavilion was organized at COP 16 by PISLM, with the financial support of Saudi Arabia. The Pavilion provided a dedicated platform for SIDS to discuss their unique challenges and showcase their achievements in SLM, governance and the application of innovative technologies, reinforcing the importance of regional cooperation and international visibility in advancing LDN in small island contexts.

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

47. In the past, a two-pronged approach was used to assist Parties in complying with reporting requirements under the UNCCD: (i) assistance was provided by the GEF through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) acting as implementing agency for national-level activities relating to reporting; and (ii) a Global Support Programme (GSP) was executed by the GM and the secretariat, primarily to provide capacity-building and technical support to Parties during the reporting process. For the next reporting process starting in 2025, national-level activities will also be supported by the FAO. Furthermore, other GEF-funded medium-sized projects will contribute to developing data and capacity for national-level monitoring, reporting, planning and implementation of LDN interventions.

A. Enabling activity umbrella projects

48. The umbrella project titled, ‘GEF Support to the 2026 UNCCD National Reporting Process’ is developed and implemented by UNEP, while the UNCCD secretariat and the GM provide support by coordinating with country Parties and ensuring follow-up. The FAO has also taken up the role of implementing agency of the umbrella project for 2026 reporting for 20 countries. Umbrella project funds are allocated to countries to support national-level data collection and coordination activities, and this funding plays a key role in enabling the countries. For the 2026 reporting cycle, the GEF, UNEP and FAO plan to make an early start in providing enabling funding to Parties, allowing countries to prepare well before the launch of the 2026 reporting process in mid-2025. At the time of writing, the GEF had published relevant information on its website on how to access the available funding, including the different options available to receive support.²⁹ Three umbrella projects have been approved by GEF.

²⁸ See <https://geo-ldn.org/ldn/about-toolbox/>.

²⁹ See <https://www.thegef.org/documents/gef-announces-support-eligible-country-parties-unccd-reporting-gef-8>.

B. Global Support Programme

49. The GM is the executing agency of the GSP which provides support to country Parties in the national reporting process, and implements the project in close coordination with the Science, Technology and Innovation unit of the UNCCD secretariat. The project helps to develop the PRAIS platform, and provides default data on SOs acquired from global sources, and technical support to countries in terms of consultations/experts and helpdesks, capacity-building workshops and assessment of financial flows for UNCCD implementation. This project is entering its fourth iteration and will help in the upcoming 2026 reporting process. The project is currently pending approval by the GEF.

C. Other related projects

50. In addition to the enabling activity umbrella projects and GSP, three GEF medium-sized projects have been planned in support of the 2026 reporting process and, more broadly, LDN implementation:

(a) The GEF-8 medium-sized project ‘Enhancing data and capacity development resources to support UNCCD country Parties in national reporting and targeting of efforts to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality’,³⁰ executed by the Betty and Gordon Moore Center for Science and Solutions at CI, and implemented by the CI-GEF Project Agency, will provide improved spatial datasets for Parties, particularly SIDS, and build an effective capacity development environment for national reporting using Trends.Earth;

(b) Going beyond reporting needs, the Convention institutions and their partners are stepping up their efforts to support the integration of LDN and related voluntary targets into (sub)national ILUP frameworks in those country Parties that may wish to engage in this process. Such efforts include the deployment of the GEF-7 Enabling Activity project ‘Integrating Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) into land use planning frameworks to strengthen national UNCCD enabling environments’,³¹ executed by the GM and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. This project focuses on direct country assistance coordinated with national processes under the second phase of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme by integrating LDN into national land use policies and practices in a gender-responsive manner. The inception workshop of this project was successfully delivered from 13 to 16 May 2025 in Johannesburg, South Africa, and an ILUP specialist was hired as project coordinator;

(c) The GEF-8 project, ‘Scaling the capacity of UNCCD Parties for inclusive decision support in Land Degradation Neutrality’,³² executed by the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Bern, Switzerland, and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in collaboration with the UNCCD, will aim to roll out inclusive and participatory processes for assessing, mapping and monitoring land degradation, and to co-develop national LDN Decision Support Systems. These systems will enhance evidence-based planning, implementation and reporting in line with SDG Target 15.3 and LDN. In August 2025, ten countries were selected to participate in the project in response to a global call for expressions of interest. While selected countries will receive dedicated support, the tools and knowledge products developed through the project will be made available globally.

VI. Reporting timeline

51. The reporting timeline developed in consultations with partners before CRIC 22 was devised with the goal of presenting the results of the 2026 reporting process at CRIC 25, scheduled to take place in 2027.³³ This timeline followed requests from Parties at CRIC 21

³⁰ See <https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/11834>.

³¹ See <https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/10909>.

³² See <https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/11935>.

³³ See annex.

that a period of up to two years be provided for national reporting. With this goal in mind, the following milestones and deadlines have been defined and were subsequently agreed upon by the institutions involved as well as the Bureaux of the CRIC and the Committee on Science and Technology:

(a) The deadline for submission of national reports is November 2026 for the section dealing with SO 1, with a second deadline in February 2027 envisaged for the remaining sections of the report. Starting with the first deadline in November 2026, the secretariat will assure the quality of the submitted information through a team of technical experts and regional centres, and an analysis of the reports and documentation for CRIC 25 will be prepared. This quality assurance step will last approximately three months. The first deadline was set to enable the secretariat to submit the SDG 15.3.1 estimates to the United Nations Statistics Division at the end of February 2027 as custodian of this Indicator;

(b) The official launch of the reporting process took place at the beginning of August 2025 with the PRAIS portal ready for access by Parties after the completion of preparatory methodological work, default data preparation and tool enhancements, giving countries almost 1.5 years to prepare their national reports;

(c) Capacity-building for reporting, including helpdesk services, will commence in 2026.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

52. Since 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 and CST 17.

53. The redesigned PRAIS platform for the 2026 reporting process responds to the requirements of Parties expressed at CRIC 21. By optimizing the platform layout, improving data validation and integrating spatial data traceability, the platform not only reduces the reporting burden but also strengthens the credibility and usability of the information provided. The expanded options and storytelling features allow countries to better reflect their unique contexts and progress, while collaborative tools foster peer learning and technical support. Ultimately, these changes ensure that national reports are not just technical submissions, but valuable contributions to global understanding and action on land degradation and drought.

54. The 2026 reporting process benefits from an evolving ecosystem of tools, such as Trends.Earth, the LDN Target Tracking Tool and the UNCCD Data Dashboard while optional high-spatial-resolution data access and decision support tools – especially for SIDS - are under development. These tools will bolster national capacity for decision-making on land degradation at the sub-national level and in countries with complex terrain. This UNCCD reporting infrastructure reflects and supports the vision for a UN 2.0 by emphasizing digitalization, open data, foresight, innovation and behaviour change among Parties.

55. Recognizing the persistent data limitations faced by SIDS, the secretariat, in collaboration with its partners, has made available high-spatial-resolution land cover and productivity datasets through customized tools tailored to national reporting needs. Despite these efforts, significant data gaps remain due to incomplete spatial and temporal coverage of the underlying satellite imagery. Furthermore, the computational demands associated with processing high-spatial-resolution datasets – often several orders of magnitude larger than their moderate-resolution counterparts – pose substantial challenges for Parties. Without adequate investment in computing infrastructure and technical capacity, the effective access, storage and analysis of these datasets may remain constrained, potentially limiting their utility in national reporting processes.

56. The secretariat is striving towards enhancing synergies in monitoring and reporting among Rio conventions. The use of existing open standards (e.g. Statistical

Data and Metadata eXchange) and application of Creative Commons licensing facilitates greater interoperability and data reuse across global reporting systems, including synergies with the SDGs and related reporting frameworks. As such, Parties may consider selecting the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence or making a public domain dedication (CC0) when submitting their national reports.

57. The updated guidance documents, new and updated default datasets and enhanced reporting tools reflect lessons learned from the 2022 reporting process. However, challenges in default data continuity persist, e.g. land cover and human population data is not available for 2023 and post-2020 respectively, while the Global Precipitation Climatology Centre dataset has not been updated since 2019.

58. The PRAIS platform and its associated tools have been designed with a high degree of flexibility and extensibility, enabling them to accommodate future strategic shifts in reporting requirements, including those that may arise from the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework. Central to this approach is the adoption of open-source technologies, which not only support long-term sustainability and innovation but also facilitate broader participation and customization by Parties.

59. To fully realize PRAIS's potential as a global reporting and knowledge platform, its ability to capture, validate and showcase field-level SLM practices must be enhanced. Integrating PRAIS with the WOCAT Global SLM Database through an automated application programming interface (API) connection would enable Parties to seamlessly retrieve and report standardized, validated SLM practices already documented in WOCAT, while providing supplementary information tailored to UNCCD reporting needs, such as the scaling potential of selected practices. This would improve understanding of the relevance, adaptability and transformative potential of SLM interventions.

60. In line with decision 2/COP.16, a hybrid capacity-building approach has been envisaged for the 2026 reporting process. This proposed approach combines updated e-learning resources, in-person workshops and on-demand technical support to Parties. Furthermore, the advent of high-spatial-resolution datasets and tools for LDN in SIDS will require customized capacity development given the unique challenges associated with high-spatial-resolution data selection, assessment and processing.

61. A decentralized model of technical backstopping – anchoring regional institutions as service hubs – enhances regional ownership, builds localized expertise and improves access to tailored support. To ensure the long-term sustainability of such efforts beyond the current reporting process, Parties may wish to consider establishing a network of regional support centres. This could be modelled on the technical and scientific cooperation mechanism established under the Convention on Biological Diversity to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

62. Participants across five GEO-LDN dialogue fora emphasized the need to strengthen national capacities for UNCCD reporting through continued training, broader stakeholder engagement – including civil society and academia – and targeted re-training on PRAIS. They recommended revising default datasets, particularly for land productivity, to ensure representativeness, and called for institutionalizing LDN Task Forces to enhance coordination. Technical assistance and dedicated LDN funding were identified as critical enablers, alongside extended timelines to support participatory planning. The UNCCD secretariat, the GM, and the GEO-LDN Initiative should jointly address these priorities to improve the effectiveness, inclusivity and sustainability of national reporting and implementation efforts.