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## Convention to Combat Desertification

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### Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

#### Twenty-third session

Panama City, Panama, 1–5 December 2025

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**Special segment: Gender Caucus**

### Information on the Gender Caucus

#### Note by the secretariat

##### *Summary*

Decision 25/COP.16 reiterates the Parties' commitment to effective implementation of the Gender Action Plan of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, its associated Roadmap, and the Gender Caucus as an annual event on the Roadmap. Paragraph 8 of the aforementioned decision requests the secretariat to facilitate the Gender Caucus as part of the official programme at every Conference of the Parties (COP) and Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC). Accordingly, the in-person sessions of the Gender Caucus at the twenty-third session of the CRIC (CRIC 23) are designed and convened to expand on the gender dimensions of relevant topics arising from discussions at the sixteenth session of the COP (COP 16), as well as topics of thematic focus for CRIC 23. These Gender Caucus sessions will provide Parties with greater capacity to design and implement gender-responsive policies and actions in their respective countries and regions, and create linkages with the gender-related topics anticipated for COP 17.



## I. Background

1. In paragraph 38 of document ICCD/CRIC(19)/5, it was noted that “the Gender Caucus proved to be an excellent tool to increase gender-aware action among delegates and should be continued. To continue with the positive trend, Parties are encouraged to actively participate in the next Gender Caucus planned to be held at COP 15”. Subsequently, at the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) in 2022, Parties welcomed the Terms of Reference of the Gender Caucus presented during its proceedings, under decision 24/COP.15. Available on the website<sup>1</sup> of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), these Terms of Reference state that the principal objective of the multi-stakeholder Gender Caucus is to provide support to strengthen the gender responsiveness of the policy and programme agenda and initiatives of the UNCCD, as outlined in the approved Gender Action Plan (GAP).
2. Specific objectives are to:
  - (a) Support the acceleration of the implementation of the UNCCD GAP at the international and country level for all Annexes;
  - (b) Assist in identification of bottlenecks to GAP implementation at the international, country and local level;
  - (c) Serve as a platform for the exchange of gender expertise, information, training and tools among UNCCD stakeholders interested in gender issues, and the UNCCD secretariat.
3. At its fifteenth session, the COP secured significant advances for the integration of gender into the UNCCD workplan, including the approval of the Roadmap for the implementation of the GAP as one item under decision 24/COP.15, “Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Gender”. The Roadmap is designed to guide and accelerate the implementation of the GAP through gender-responsive and transformative approaches, in addition to calling for annual meetings of the Gender Caucus to be convened, in item 3.3, “to guide, advise and address bottlenecks for gender-responsive programmes”.
4. Subsequently, the third edition of the Gender Caucus was convened during the twenty-first session of the CRIC (CRIC 21), held in November 2023 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Topics addressed were: (i) rolling out the Gender Roadmap, with recommendations for gender phrasing; and (ii) women’s knowledge and empowerment for drought-resilient drylands. A total of 123 persons participated, encompassing a balance between Parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), United Nations agencies, and other stakeholders.
5. The report on the Gender Caucus sessions held at CRIC 21 can be found on the UNCCD website.<sup>2</sup>
6. The fourth edition of the Gender Caucus was held during COP 16 in December 2024, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. COP 16 proved to be a decisive moment to report on progress to date under the GAP and its Roadmap for acceleration of implementation, and for securing further commitments from Parties to advance gender equality on various levels. The Gender Caucus session included a high-level event in addition to two technical sessions. The high-level event was structured as a high-level interactive dialogue focused on the HerLand campaign and women’s leadership for sustainable land management (SLM). Topics covered at the technical sessions were: (i) emerging best practices on the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive indicators for desertification, land degradation and drought; and (ii) women-led solutions for drought resilience, featuring country-level champions.
7. Altogether, 540 participants attended the Gender Caucus events, including high-level officials, country Party delegates, representatives of international agencies, gender experts, CSOs, the media and youth organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2025-07/Gender%20Caucus%20TOR.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2024-01/Gender%20caucus%20report\\_cric%2021%20designed.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2024-01/Gender%20caucus%20report_cric%2021%20designed.pdf).

8. The detailed report on the Gender Caucus sessions held at COP 16 is available on the UNCCD website.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Topics for Gender Caucus sessions at the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

9. Based on recent COP decisions and the topics of thematic focus selected for CRIC 23, the Gender Caucus sessions will focus on: (i) leadership and worldviews of Indigenous women for SLM; and (ii) exploring the gender dimensions of sand and dust storms.

### Rationale and outline for each session

#### 1. Session 1: Leadership and worldviews of Indigenous women for sustainable land management

10. Decision 25/COP.16 explicitly notes the need to engage Indigenous women in initiatives under the GAP, and to advocate for the land rights of Indigenous women, in collaboration with the Rio conventions and key actors in this endeavour. This decision also requests that the secretariat encourage the participation of Indigenous women and girls in the Gender Caucus sessions that it convenes.

11. At COP 16 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, under decision 24/COP.16, Parties also took note of the “Sacred Lands Indigenous Peoples Declaration,” which calls on governments to respect and protect Indigenous land tenure systems and ensure the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples – including women and youth – as rights-holders in land-related decision-making. This Declaration urges Parties to establish a distinct Indigenous Peoples Caucus under the UNCCD, noting that gender-responsive, community-led land restoration and drought resilience efforts require the leadership of Indigenous women.

12. The growing momentum around the need to recognize and engage with Indigenous women leaders is also evident in recent United Nations and international conference outcomes, which have clearly recognized the pivotal role of Indigenous women in SLM. The 2025 session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues reaffirmed that Indigenous women are “critical agents of change in protecting ecosystems and advancing climate resilience,” underscoring the need for Member States to secure their land and resource rights and strengthen their participation in environmental governance. Furthermore, the 2025 Human Rights Council report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur asserts that Indigenous women are vital in preserving and transmitting traditional ecological knowledge that is foundational to land restoration, food security and biodiversity management.

13. Indigenous peoples have maintained a special relationship with land across generations, since time immemorial. Indigenous women, in particular, are longstanding custodians of the land, implementing expert, ancestral Indigenous knowledge and practices with enduring relevance and adaptability, while also employing cutting-edge scientific approaches, as appropriate.

14. **The purpose** of this Gender Caucus session at CRIC 23 will be to highlight and learn how Indigenous women in many countries around the world are making unique and critical contributions to sustainable land management and governance.

15. **The expected outcome** is greater awareness of the perspectives, priorities and contributions of Indigenous women for SLM, which can guide the formulation of the CRIC 23 recommendations.

16. Diverse insights and stories to be shared in this Gender Caucus session may focus on aspects such as:

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2024-12/Gender%20Caucus%20report%20COP16\\_0.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2024-12/Gender%20Caucus%20report%20COP16_0.pdf).

- The meaning and value of land in the worldview of first nations;
  - Practices led by Indigenous women to protect and cultivate land;
  - Understandings of and arrangements for inclusive land tenure;
  - Current land-related challenges from a gender perspective;
  - How Indigenous women and girls navigate the interface between traditions and the latest advances in science;
  - Other relevant topics.
17. The speakers will be Indigenous women leaders from a range of regions and nations.

## 2. Session 2: Exploring the gender dimensions of sand and dust storms

18. Sand and dust storms (SDS) is a relatively new but increasingly relevant thematic area addressed by UNCCD under its mandate to combat desertification, land degradation and drought. Referring to an initial consideration of the gender dimensions of SDS, decision 27/COP.16, “Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Sand and dust storms,” urges Parties to strengthen multi-stakeholder platforms addressing mitigation of SDS, with consideration of the impacts on and involvement of women, youth and other vulnerable groups.

19. As an existing multi-stakeholder platform, the UNCCD Gender Caucus serves to facilitate a gender lens for SDS, under its mandate “to provide support to strengthen the gender responsiveness of the policy and programme agenda and initiatives of the UNCCD”. Accordingly, it is a suitable forum in which to present these initial findings on gender and SDS, discuss them with stakeholders, and start to envision more in-depth research and policy planning. In addition, item 4.1 of the GAP Roadmap calls on the secretariat, Parties and relevant organizations to “develop evidence and policy relevant research to collect data and information with a view to establishing a baseline on key gender metrics and to inform policy and decision-making processes”.

20. The Sand and Dust Storms Compendium,<sup>4</sup> the most comprehensive resource available for framing, analysing and guiding policies and programmes on SDS, also alludes to gender dimensions, outlining that SDS have multiple impacts on people and the environment, which can be positive or extremely negative. SDS affect men and women in sometimes different ways, at various scales, and in key sectors, including health, transportation, agriculture and air and water quality.

21. To best manage this damaging and unpredictable environmental hazard, it is imperative to consider (i) the roles of specific groups of people in the genesis of SDS; (ii) the impacts of SDS on vulnerable individuals, groups and communities; and (iii) the adaptation practices that are variously used to accommodate lives and livelihoods to these environmental phenomena. Applying a gender lens to SDS allows us to better identify those most implicated and affected as well as the most promising adaptation approaches, and subsequently to develop gender-responsive policies and initiatives to most effectively manage SDS.

22. Over the last two decades, extensive research and analysis have been undertaken on the gender dimensions of climate change in its diverse manifestations. However, to date, only scant data and analysis are available for the gender dimensions of SDS specifically. This session will start to explore the gender differences shaping SDS and how women and men are affected differently, while also indicating further data and analysis that may be conducted to fill these gaps.

23. **The purpose** of the Gender Caucus session at CRIC 23 will be to draw on country-based examples to learn illustrative ways in which men, women, boys and girls are affected by and adapting to SDS, and map these differences through a gender-transformative framework.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-05/1871\\_Book\\_SDS\\_%20Compendium\\_V1.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-05/1871_Book_SDS_%20Compendium_V1.pdf).

24. **The expected outcome** is greater awareness of the gender dimensions of SDS and the data gaps in this field, which may guide the formulation of CRIC 23 recommendations.
25. This session will:
- (a) Explore and outline the different roles and inputs (both qualitative and quantitative) of men and women in terms of causing or exacerbating SDS;
  - (b) Explain how men, women, boys and girls are affected differently by SDS due to gender roles and livelihood activities, with consideration given to health impacts;
  - (c) Document and analyze the adaptation practices used by men and women in the face of SDS, including both positive and negative coping mechanisms;
  - (d) Indicate data gaps encountered, and proposed approaches for gathering this missing data, as well as research questions.

### **III. Conclusions and recommendations**

26. **For the third consecutive year, the Gender Caucus sessions at CRIC 23 will provide a platform for sharing expertise, knowledge and experiences to guide the gender-responsive implementation of the Convention.**
27. **All delegates, observers and attendees at CRIC 23 are welcome to engage in the Gender Caucus sessions.**
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