



**Convention to Combat
Desertification**

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Policy frameworks and thematic issues

**The positive role that measures taken under the Convention
can play to address desertification, land degradation and
drought as one of the drivers that causes migration**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This note responds to the request made to the secretariat in decision 23/COP.16 to report on progress made to the Conference of the Parties at its seventeenth session. It highlights the activities undertaken by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism since COP.16 regarding the positive role that measures taken under the Convention can play to address desertification, land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that causes migration.

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I. Introduction

1. COP decisions on migration have highlighted the positive role that SLM can play to promote stable livelihoods, food security, and employment creation for rural communities, thereby creating the enabling conditions for them to remain on their land or ensuring that rural out-migration is safe and voluntary. Specifically, Parties have requested guidance on governance frameworks that can be used to more effectively manage urban-rural linkages and reduce their negative impacts on land and livelihoods in rural areas. They also requested assistance on developing resource mobilisation strategies to leverage private sources of investment or to establish integrated initiatives that address land degradation as one of the drivers of migration and displacement.

II. Urban-Rural Linkages and Land

2. In decision 23/COP16, Parties welcomed the collaboration established between the UNCCD secretariat and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), as well as the publication of the *Primer on Urban-Rural Linkages and Land* in 2024.¹ The Primer identifies the key functional characteristics of urban-rural linkages (URL) that pose unique challenges to the health and productivity of the land and describes the relevant URL actors, approaches, and tools that can be used to enhance LDN initiatives. In the same decision, Parties requested further support to strengthen URL through territorial governance systems and to use the Primer as guidance.

3. Land and territorial governance frameworks are still largely focused on fixed boundaries and area-based measures. While these approaches are necessary, they are often insufficient to address the flows of people, goods, and services that generate pressures and impacts on land, water, and livelihoods. Governance systems often fail to recognise that decisions taken in one jurisdiction can have harmful social, economic, and environmental outcomes in nearby or distant ones. As a result, many URL that tend to drive land degradation and rural out-migration are not well understood and adequately considered in the relevant political and administrative spheres of land governance and management.

4. A note developed with UN-Habitat and published by the secretariat with funding from the Peoples' Republic of China introduces the Flows-to-Action Framework -- a phased approach to the application of flow-based governance strategies and response measures. The framework integrates an evidence-based governance logic into existing policy, planning, and decision-making processes to more effectively manage URL flows and their functional interdependencies – with a focus on the indirect and distant drivers of land degradation, migration, and rural decline.

(a) *Flow-based governance can complement and strengthen existing territorial governance approaches by making URL flows more visible and actionable.* Flow-based governance does not require new institutions or major reforms. Proactively and responsibly managing priority flows of goods and services (e.g., food, water, energy) can support sustainable land and water management, diversify rural livelihood opportunities, and promote greater urban-rural equality, while avoiding or reducing migration and displacement.

(b) *Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are necessary to govern URL flows and their supporting infrastructure and networks, enabling cooperation and coordination among actors and across territories.* Collaboration around a shared goal to avoid and reduce URL impacts on land and livelihoods is an essential part of a unified, integrated governance framework – one that leverages legal, regulatory, and budgetary procedures to foster a culture of responsibility and sustainability.

(c) *Ensuring transparency and accountability for the risks and responsibilities associated with URL flows can help prevent demand-driven risks, pressures, and impacts from being disproportionately transferred to rural areas.* The evidence base for flow-based

¹ <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/primer-urban-rural-linkages-and-land>.

governance strategies should be developed using robust data and information systems that align functional and spatial planning across different sectors and scales. Ultimately, URL flow interdependencies must be recognised as a legitimate governance responsibility -- normalised within collaborative planning and management practices, with the aim of diversifying livelihood opportunities and avoiding harmful impacts in rural areas.

III. Related Knowledge Products

5. In collaboration with partners, the secretariat produced two significant reports in 2025 that explore integrated approaches that aim to simultaneously address land degradation and improve rural livelihoods.

6. With the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and other partners, the *Global Land Outlook Thematic Report on Ecological Connectivity and Land Restoration* was launched at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in October 2025.² Ecological connectivity is a broad concept that considers the biotic and abiotic structures and functions that support healthy populations and the delivery of ecosystem services that underpin our societies and economies. For instance, clean air and water, pollination and pest control, soil erosion and flood control and climate regulation are all dependent on ecological connectivity. Connectivity allows for the flow of resources, information and species, necessary for enhancing the resilience of socio-ecological systems in the face of climate change, land degradation, drought, and biodiversity loss. Restoring and maintaining ecological connectivity is often considered an essential element in land restoration initiatives that aim to regenerate natural capital for long-term resilience and stable rural development.

7. With the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and United Nations University Vice-Rectorate in Europe (UNU-VIE), *A natural fit: Renewable energy and sustainable land management* was published in December 2025.³ A webinar in January 2026 highlighted how combining renewable energy development and sustainable land, water, and grazing management practices can support multiple socio-economic and development objectives.⁴ These dual-use systems can provide clean energy alternatives to the millions of people who still lack access to electricity and rely on traditional biomass for cooking. Improved access to low-cost clean energy at the farm and community levels provides critical support for sustainable water use in agriculture, zero-emission farm machinery, and food processing and storage that can reduce food loss, improve supply chain integration, and enhance community resilience. The adoption of renewable energy technologies is closely linked to the effective implementation of the three Rio conventions, offering numerous entry points for scaling up projects and programmes that integrate renewable energy and sustainable land management.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

8. The COP recognizes that desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) are among the factors that can contribute to migration and displacement, particularly by affecting food and nutritional security, livelihoods and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and pressures. While migration is influenced by a range of social, economic and political factors, available evidence indicates that DLDD can play an important role in shaping migration dynamics.

9. A 2023 study on Central Asia, commissioned by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, finds that while migration is primarily influenced by socio-economic factors, desertification, land degradation and drought can contribute to migration dynamics, particularly by affecting livelihoods and exacerbating existing

² <https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/glo-thematic-report-ecological-connectivity-and-land-restoration>.

³ <https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/natural-fit-renewable-energy-and-sustainable-land-management>.

⁴ <https://www.iisd.org/publications/report/renewable-energy-land-management>.

vulnerabilities. The study shows that these linkages can be observed across different levels of society, from small-scale farmer households to broader institutional contexts.⁵

10. Available evidence further indicates that desertification, land degradation and drought can exacerbate socio-economic vulnerabilities, particularly where livelihoods depend directly on land, water and ecosystem services. Recent analysis by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) highlights that land degradation affects agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods and food security⁶, while the World Bank's Groundswell work identifies water scarcity and declining crop productivity as factors that can shape internal climate migration and highlights the importance of green, inclusive and resilient development responses⁷. Recent international policy discussions, including the G7 declaration on desertification and security, have also recognized desertification, land degradation and drought as systemic environmental, economic, social and security challenges that contributes to migration and displacement, and emphasized integrated, coordinated and forward-looking action to strengthen resilience and promote sustainable management and restoration in affected landscapes.⁸

11. Addressing DLDD through sustainable land and water management, drought resilience, improved governance of urban–rural linkages and other integrated approaches can contribute to reducing risks and vulnerabilities associated with migration and displacement, while strengthening livelihoods, resilience and long-term socio-economic stability in affected rural areas.

12. Building on existing work, including the Initiative on Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S), the COP may wish to further explore the ways and means to further strengthen coordinated efforts among United Nations entities, international and regional organizations and other relevant stakeholders to promote the positive role that sustainable land, soil and water management, conservation and restoration can play in addressing desertification, land degradation and drought as one of the drivers of migration, displacement and other forms of human mobility, while contributing to resilience, stability and security.

13. The COP may also wish to explore ways and means to integrate considerations related to displacement and other forms of human mobility into relevant national planning frameworks, including national action programmes to combat desertification, land degradation and drought with a view to strengthening anticipatory planning, risk-informed decision-making and investments in resilience-building efforts in affected areas.

14. The COP may also wish to explore ways and means to strengthen anticipatory planning, early warning systems and drought preparedness frameworks, including through improved data and information-sharing on the linkages between desertification, land degradation, drought and human mobility, in order to support timely and integrated responses that reduce vulnerabilities associated with displacement, particularly in fragile and vulnerable contexts.

15. The COP may wish to further explore the ways and means to scale up context-specific land and water management responses that increase agricultural productivity, food security, freshwater availability, and stable livelihoods in rural areas.

16. The COP may also wish to request the secretariat and the GM to develop strategies and initiatives to assist countries in their efforts to implement sustainable

⁵ <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2023-08/Study%20migration%20Central%20Asia%20full%20ENG.pdf>

⁶ FAO. 2025. The State of Food and Agriculture 2025 – Addressing land degradation across landholding scales. Rome.

⁷ Clement, Viviane; Rigaud, Kanta Kumari; de Sherbinin, Alex; Jones, Bryan; Adamo, Susana; Schewe, Jacob; Sadiq, Nian; Shabhat, Elham. 2021. Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration. © World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/36248> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

⁸ <https://g7g20-documents.org/database/document/2026-g7-france-ministerial-meetings-environment-ministers-ministers-language-desertification-and-security>

land and water management practices that increase sustainability, stability and security particularly in rural areas, thereby contributing to resilience, supporting communities to remain in place where they choose to do so, and addressing some of the underlying drivers of displacement and other forms of human mobility.
