



**Convention to Combat
Desertification**

Distr.: General
5 May 2026

Original: English

Conference of the Parties

Seventeenth session

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 17–28 August 2026

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Policy frameworks and thematic issues

**Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: gender,
land tenure, and sand and dust storms**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This note responds to the requests made to the secretariat in decisions 25/COP.16, 28/COP.16, and 27/COP.16 to report on progress made to the Conference of the Parties (COP) at its seventeenth session. It highlights the activities undertaken by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism since the sixteenth session of the COP regarding the policy frameworks on gender, land tenure, and sand and dust storms. The consolidation of these three policy frameworks into one document is the result of budget cuts at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

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I. Introduction

1. Decisions 25/COP.16, 28/COP.16 and 27/COP.16 requested the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) to report on the progress made in implementing these decisions to the Conference of Parties (COP) at its seventeenth session. The issues of gender, land tenure, and sand and dust storms (SDS) are critical policy issues that need to be addressed by all Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to ensure the more effective implementation of the Convention. Gender equality, tenure security, and inclusive SDS management are essential prerequisites for all stakeholders to fully contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular the scaling up of sustainable land and water management practices and achieving land degradation neutrality (LDN) by 2030.

II. Gender

A. Gender Action Plan and its Roadmap

2. Since its adoption at the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 13), the Gender Action Plan (GAP) has provided guidance for the implementation of the Convention's gender-related activities. The Gender Action Plan Roadmap (GAP Roadmap) approved at COP 15 provides a timeline for specific activities and concrete measures to be undertaken by all UNCCD stakeholders. In collaboration with the other Rio conventions and other relevant conventions and international organizations, such as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the secretariat and the GM continue to support the implementation of the GAP and the GAP Roadmap, including advocacy for the recognition and improvement of women's land rights.

3. The secretariat hosted a workshop organized by UN-Women in July 2025, involving the secretariats of the three Rio conventions. The theme was "Gender-Responsive Synergies Across the Rio Conventions", with the aim of exploring how to align their respective gender action plans and boost collaboration to promote gender equality across the climate, land and biodiversity agendas.¹ The workshop marked a significant step toward deepening gender-responsive synergies across the Rio conventions. Participants emphasized the need for coordinated long-term actions and the establishment of a space for continuous engagement, including communication channels to ensure accountability and follow-up on commitments. This could involve developing a roadmap of short- and long-term opportunities and activities.

4. The second phase of the UNCCD–World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) project titled Gender-responsive Sustainable Land Management was concluded in 2025. The project developed and refined a gender-responsive sustainable land management (SLM) assessment tool to identify gaps and scale SLM practices and approaches that benefit women and men equally.² As part of this second phase, the project integrated the gender-responsive SLM tool into the Global Sustainable Land Management Database, enabling online assessment of SLM practices and the identification of gender-responsive solutions.³ The platform supports the harmonized collection, analysis and sharing of gender-disaggregated data to inform decision-making on land management and drought resilience, providing a space for dialogue on gender and land-related issues. The tool comprises a dedicated questionnaire, a template for publishing and accessing entries, and an automatically generated summary report. Furthermore, a number of guides were published to support the application and implementation of the tool in project and programme contexts.⁴

5. In response to persistent gaps in understanding the gender dimensions of SDS – including their drivers, differentiated impacts, and adaptation practices – a team of United

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/11/gender-responsive-synergies-across-the-rio-conventions-multi-stakeholder-perspectives>.

² <https://wocat.net/en/projects-and-countries/projects/gender/>.

³ <https://wocat.net/en/database/list/?type=gender>.

⁴ <https://wocat.net/en/wocat-media-library/gender-responsive-slm-tool-how-to-guides/>.

Nations University (UNU) students undertook a scoping research project under the supervision of the secretariat. The initiative was aligned with the GAP Roadmap, which calls for evidence-based, policy-relevant research to strengthen baseline gender data and inform decision-making. The UNU students assessed existing data and developed three illustrative national case studies for Australia, Egypt and Mali. The findings were presented during a Gender Caucus session at the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 23), identifying key data gaps and priority areas for further analysis and laying the groundwork for a more comprehensive examination of the gender dimensions of SDS to inform future policy development and implementation under the Convention.

B. Capacity-building

6. A number of activities were undertaken to build capacity in advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality in relation to desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), focusing on topics such as gender and restoration, gender gaps in UNCCD implementation, and women-led solutions for drought resilience.⁵ The target participants for these capacity-building sessions included national focal points, UNCCD staff and interns, as well as civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders.

7. Together with the WeCaN platform for women’s empowerment in dryland regions, the UNCCD secretariat organized an event on gender-responsive land management planning during the regional workshop of the Dryland Sustainable Landscapes Impact Program (DSL-IP) held in Maputo, Mozambique, under the Seventh Replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The DSL-IP programme seeks to avoid, reduce and reverse further land degradation, desertification, and deforestation in dryland ecosystems by promoting the sustainable management of production landscapes, including both agricultural lands and remaining forest patches.⁶

C. Gender parity

8. An analytical study “Monitoring of gender parity levels across UNCCD” was published for COP 16, which established a baseline for monitoring gender parity across the Convention, including its subsidiary bodies and institutions. The study found that parity across UNCCD structures remains uneven, while noting strong representation in the CRIC Bureau, COP Bureau, the Science-Policy Interface and the secretariat.⁷

9. In 2025, the first voluntary contribution specifically earmarked to advance gender parity was made by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), enabling the participation of women delegates in CRIC 23. Under the UNCCD Women Delegates Fund (WDF), 14 women delegates participated in a two-day in-person negotiation training in Panama City prior to CRIC 23. The training, delivered by the Centre for Multilateral Negotiations in English with interpretation into French and Spanish, strengthened delegates’ capacity to engage effectively in UNCCD multilateral negotiations and decision-making processes. It built upon a prior virtual session delivered by the secretariat on the Convention’s mandate and procedures. Through a structured, practice-oriented approach, participants moved from identifying barriers – such as language constraints and procedural complexity – to applying negotiation and facilitation strategies, including coalition-building, trade-off management, and chairing under conditions of neutrality and fairness. Participants emphasized the importance of sustaining the WDF as a continuous capacity development platform to ensure women’s voices and representation in negotiation spaces.

⁵ <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/women-led-solutions-drought-resilience>.

⁶ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/dryland-sustainable-landscapes/news-and-events/news-detail/women-led-solutions-for-drought-resilience/en>.

⁷ <https://www.unccd.int/resources/reports/monitoring-gender-parity-levels-across-unccd>.

10. A complementary European Union initiative, the Female Negotiators Project, provided negotiation capacity-building and travel support to an additional 15 UNCCD women negotiators. Together, these efforts contributed to a marked improvement in gender balance at CRIC 23, where near parity was achieved among delegates. These results illustrate that targeted and strategic investments – even when relatively modest – can yield measurable progress toward gender parity within the UNCCD context. Sustaining these gains will require continued contributions and commitments to ensuring women’s leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making processes under the Convention.

D. United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

11. The latest United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) report for the UNCCD was submitted for the 2024 reporting cycle. According to UN-Women, UNCCD’s performance was rated above average for both the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations system overall,⁸ meeting or exceeding the requirements for 13 of the 17 applicable indicators. UN-Women encouraged the UNCCD to prioritize work on the Financial Resource Allocation indicator, as well as the three indicators rated as ‘approaches requirements’: Financial Resource Tracking, Equal Representation of Women, and Coherence. The UN-SWAP report for 2025 was completed by the secretariat and submitted in April 2026.

E. Gender Caucus

1. Sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties

12. In line with the GAP Roadmap, the secretariat convened three Gender Caucus sessions during COP 16 in Riyadh. A high-level event, chaired by Ms. Tarja Halonen, UNCCD Land Ambassador and former President of Finland, was followed by two thematic sessions focusing on (1) sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive indicators for DLDD; and (2) women-led solutions for drought resilience. These sessions underscored how to better measure and recognize women’s contributions to combating drought, advancing land restoration, and promoting sustainable land and food systems, thereby contributing to the implementation of the GAP and the GAP Roadmap. The events brought together more than 540 participants, including country Party delegates, representatives of international organizations, civil society, the media and youth groups.⁹

2. Twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

13. At CRIC 23 in Panama City, the secretariat convened two in-session Gender Caucus meetings. The first session, Leadership and Worldviews of Indigenous Women for Sustainable Land Management, highlighted the vital contributions of Indigenous women to land stewardship, drawing on traditional knowledge in combination with scientific innovation, and provided space to reflect on their leadership in implementing the Convention. The second session, Gender Dimensions of Sand and Dust Storms, drew on country-based experiences to demonstrate how women and men and girls and boys are differently affected by and respond differently to SDS and considered pathways to address data gaps and strengthen gender-responsive analysis.

14. During the CRIC 23 discussions, country Parties and representatives of international organizations and CSOs reaffirmed the value of the Gender Caucus as a platform supporting the implementation of the GAP and the GAP Roadmap. They underscored the importance of secure land tenure and equitable access to land and resources for effectively addressing DLDD and SDS and achieving LDN targets. Participants further emphasized the central role of Indigenous women’s knowledge systems, the need for inclusive decision-making, as well

⁸ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/2024-uncdd-swap-2-reporting-results-en.pdf>.

⁹ <https://www.uncdd.int/sites/default/files/2025-02/2424286E.pdf>.

as the importance of strengthening gender-responsive data and integrating traditional and scientific knowledge to enhance resilience and support the effective implementation of the Convention.¹⁰

F. Gender indicators

15. Work on the indicators for the post-2030 strategic framework of the UNCCD, including consideration of gender-specific indicators, can begin once the key elements of the framework have been identified. See section III.D. on tenure indicators and datasets below for an update on gender-related tenure indicators.

III. Land tenure

16. In response to the requests contained in decision 28/COP.16, the secretariat has developed the Land Tenure Toolbox, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and partners, to be published before COP 17. It aims to provide stakeholders with easy access to all official documents, practical tools, technical guides, policy guidelines, and financing approaches that can be used to assist Parties in their efforts to recognize, document and enforce legitimate land rights, especially in the context of SLM and land restoration activities.

A. Land Tenure Toolbox

17. The Land Tenure Toolbox is composed of six modules: Principles and Guidelines; Knowledge and Awareness; Women's Land Rights; Grievance Mechanisms; Finance and Monitoring; and Partner Resources. Each module contains background and context for UNCCD stakeholders, with links to the relevant documentation produced by the secretariat, the GM and partners to assist Parties in their efforts to improve land tenure security for their citizens.¹¹

18. The secretariat was also requested to carry out awareness-raising actions on the existing accountability and grievance mechanisms of GEF implementing agencies related to land tenure. A dedicated module in the Toolbox contains profiles of each implementation agency's grievance mechanism related to land tenure, as well as case studies that document specific applications of these mechanisms. This module also features over 25 case studies, curated from stakeholder submissions received at the beginning of July 2025, highlighting national and subnational experiences with accountability and grievance mechanisms.¹²

B. UNCCD–FAO Initiative on Land Tenure

19. Under a recently signed memorandum of understanding, the UNCCD and FAO continue to explore opportunities to finance, organize and deliver national land tenure consultations requested by Parties. Further support to four countries (Kyrgyzstan, Paraguay, South Sudan and Sri Lanka) will be provided through the project Addressing Tenure Governance and Gender Equality in Land Rights to Strengthen LDN Initiatives (2025–2028), funded under the Eighth Replenishment of the GEF and to be executed by three international partners (International Land Coalition (ILC), Landesa and TMG Research) and national partners. Subject to the availability of resources, the joint initiative would be in a position to support more countries in organizing national consultations to advance their efforts to integrate tenure into their LDN initiatives, projects and programmes, including the provision of capacity-building for reporting on tenure indicators.

¹⁰ <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2026-01/2520637E.pdf>.

¹¹ <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/land-tenure/toolbox>.

¹² <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/notifications/accountability-and-grievance-mechanisms-related-land-tenure-call>.

20. A UNCCD–FAO side event was organized at CRIC 23 to exchange knowledge and experiences on grievance mechanisms and to inform the development of the Land Tenure Toolbox and related awareness-raising actions. The discussion highlighted that grievance and accountability mechanisms should be understood not only as remedial pathways once harm has occurred, but also as preventive instruments that can identify risks early, strengthen safeguards and improve project design. Participants noted that despite progress, people in vulnerable situations – particularly women – continue to face persistent barriers to accessing complaint systems and obtaining meaningful redress. They welcomed the Toolbox and emphasized that it should be accessible and practice-oriented.

21. The UNCCD participated in various parallel events and high-level consultations during the Second International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) held in Cartagena, Colombia, in February 2026. In particular, the UNCCD co-organized parallel events with FAO and other partners (TMG Research, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and GIZ) on sustainable agriculture and responsible governance, and women’s land rights in the context of the Rio conventions. A central theme of the conference was ensuring women’s rights to land and property, recognizing them as essential beneficiaries and leaders in rural development and promoting gender justice in the access to productive land resources.¹³

22. In April 2026, the UNCCD and FAO hosted three regional land tenure webinars for UNCCD and other stakeholders to present the Land Tenure Toolbox, with a specific focus on grievance mechanisms related to land tenure. The webinars promoted the sharing of experiences, as well as updates on tenure datasets and indicators and women’s land rights. Speakers included representatives from the GEF implementing agencies, governments and CSOs.¹⁴

C. Women’s land rights

23. Within the framework of The Women’s Land Rights Initiative led by the Robert Bosch Stiftung and TMG Research,¹⁵ the secretariat was involved in co-organizing two Strategy Workshops on Women’s Land Rights and the Rio Conventions held in Berlin (2024) and Nairobi (2025). Each workshop brought together around 60 stakeholders from more than 30 countries, including UNCCD national focal points, Rio convention secretariats and other United Nations bodies, and CSOs. They explored pathways for leveraging synergies to advance women’s land rights across the Rio conventions by identifying first entry points for coordinated action to increase gender equality in the land use sector and to strengthen the agency of grassroots organizations in this endeavour. Workshop participants focused on ways and means to harmonize gender commitments across the Rio conventions, strengthen solidarity in climate finance, and embed women’s land rights in national agendas, strategies, and action plans.¹⁶

D. Tenure indicators and datasets

24. The secretariat was part of the Technical Reference Group that published *The Status of Land Tenure and Governance* report in February 2026, the main knowledge product of the Global Land Observatory, an FAO initiative in partnership with ILC and the French Agricultural Research Center for International Development.¹⁷ This report offers new insights and assesses data and reporting on tenure systems, land distribution, governance frameworks, women’s land rights, and customary rights. It concluded that it is possible to monitor and report on legitimate land rights in the context of the Convention.

¹³ <https://www.fao.org/tenure/activities/meetings-events/icarrd20/en/>.

¹⁴ <https://www.unccd.int/events/other/unccd-fao-regional-webinars-tenure-security>.

¹⁵ <https://www.tmg-thinktank.com/initiatives/the-womens-land-rights-initiative>.

¹⁶ https://assets.ctfassets.net/o4c8rkff7hqs/7EetyqBW7VrtHM4h4ZquyZ/ae460b0ce4f2be4fff142412246cf14c/Listicle_WLRI.pdf.

¹⁷ <https://www.fao.org/tenure/activities/meetings-events/status-of-land-tenure-and-governance-sltg-launch/en/>.

25. When considered together, population-based, area-based and geospatial datasets on land tenure exist for most countries, ranging from SDG Indicator 1.4.2 and the Global Land Observatory's land tenure map to LandMark, Prindex, and national statistical sources. Currently, data for SDG Indicator 1.4.2 (perceived and legally recognized land tenure security) is available for over 60 countries. Area-based data for private, public, and customary lands is also available for many countries, with some reporting high levels of identifiable coverage (81–100 per cent), while others remain at lower levels (0–20 per cent). The Technical Reference Group for this report, including FAO, TMG Research, ILC, Landesa, and other partners, stands ready to provide support to Parties, including in the development of the post-2030 strategic framework of the UNCCD and ensuring the interoperability between UNCCD national reporting and global data repositories.

IV. Sand and dust storms

A. United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms

26. In response to decision 27/COP.16, the secretariat continues to be an active member of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms, participating in the tenth meeting of the Coalition held in Geneva in March 2025. Since that meeting, the UNCCD and other members of the Coalition drafted an action plan for the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms (2025–2034), contributed to the concept note for the President of the General Assembly high-level event on SDS held in New York on 10 July 2025 in observance of the International Day of Combating Sand and Dust Storms on 12 July 2025, and launched the Coalition's new logo and website.¹⁸ The UNCCD also provided inputs to the United Nations Secretary-General's annual report for 2025 on combating SDS (A/80/265). The eleventh meeting of the Coalition took place in Beirut in October 2025 on the margins of the Forum on Fostering Interregional Collaboration on Sand and Dust Storms organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The twelfth meeting was held virtually in March 2026.

B. Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox

27. The recent update to the Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox was notable with the revision of the module on source detection (identifying and mapping SDS sources) and the creation of an inventory of tools, technologies and good practices for SDS source management. This update is expected to be launched on 12 July 2026 as part of the International Day of Combating Sand and Dust Storms.¹⁹

28. The source detection module provides an overview of common approaches and methods used to detect SDS sources as part of a basic workflow. Accurate and up-to-date maps are essential for planning and designing effective SDS source management interventions; however, identifying and mapping SDS source areas can be a politically sensitive issue. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of SDS sources poses serious methodological challenges to their precise and timely detection. Countries and regions must decide for themselves which source detection approaches and methods are most appropriate for their specific context and how best to use the results to inform SDS source management decisions.

29. This source management module now features a searchable inventory of documented tools, technologies and good practices that can be used to avoid, reduce and manage SDS sources. It is designed to provide simple and easy access to the knowledge base, which can assist national and subnational authorities, as well as donors, communities, and the private sector, by informing effective source management practices that are appropriate within a given context.

¹⁸ <https://unsdscoalition.org/index.html>.

¹⁹ <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/sand-and-dust-storms/toolbox>.

C. Global Implementation Initiative for Sand and Dust Storms source management²⁰

30. Guided by decisions 3/COP.16 and 27/COP.16, the GM, in collaboration with the secretariat and partners, has been developing a Global Implementation Initiative for Sand and Dust Storms (GISDS) to help fulfil the ambition of Parties to address and better manage anthropogenic SDS sources and contribute to the implementation of the action plan for the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms (2025–2034). The GISDS is designed to serve as a catalyst for on-the-ground interventions, resource mobilization and large-scale transformation to manage SDS sources and impacts and thereby protect people and ecosystems at all levels. The GISDS framework proposes the following four-pillar approach for source-focused action for the period of 2026–2035:

(a) Pillar 1. Land-focused monitoring and assessment: Transform monitoring from atmospheric dust detection to land-based wind erosion assessment through standardized in situ measurements, vegetation structural indicators, land use data, monitoring of climatic conditions (wind, moisture), soil surface condition monitoring, and integration of land health data with remote sensing and dust emission modelling, as well as exploring new approaches such as machine learning and artificial intelligence tools;

(b) Pillar 2. Source area stabilization and restoration: Stabilize dust-generating lands through evidence-based SLM and water use methodologies that address first-order controls on wind erosion such as soil, vegetation structure, and surface roughness;

(c) Pillar 3. Science-policy integration for source mitigation: Bridge the disconnect between SDS-related science and land management by refocusing modelling efforts, improving collaboration between dust and wind erosion-related scientific and academic communities, and developing frameworks that support management decisions;

(d) Pillar 4. Coordinated response and capacity-building: Build capacity for source-focused SDS mitigation through (sub)regional cooperation and financing, early warning systems linked to land management, and integration of monitoring data to inform adaptive management at all levels.

31. The expected outcomes of the GISDS will include, inter alia:

(a) Environmental restoration: stabilized dust source areas with enhanced soil health, restored vegetation structure, improved land function, and demonstrable reductions in wind erosion and dust emission rather than just atmospheric dust concentrations;

(b) Economic benefits: Prevention in annual losses from agriculture, health, transportation, energy, household impacts, and infrastructure damage, with returns on mitigation investment based on comprehensive economic analysis;

(c) Health and safety: Significant reduction in health concerns and burdens from dust exposure through source-focused prevention;

(d) Scientific advancement: Resolution of the disconnect between dust modeling and source mitigation through improved monitoring networks, better model representation of land processes, and frameworks that support evidence-based management decisions using land potential and ecological state concepts.

32. In July 2025, the UNCCD Global Community of Learning and Practice on Drought Management, in collaboration with the Global Water Partnership, convened a virtual learning exchange to mark the International Day of Combating Sand and Dust Storms. The session brought together international experts and practitioners to deepen the understanding of the environmental, health and socioeconomic impacts of SDS. It featured technical presentations on dust source mapping, forecasting systems, and impact assessment, highlighting the importance of distinguishing between dust source types, strengthening early warning systems and promoting tailored mitigation and adaptation strategies. The exchange concluded with an interactive discussion emphasizing transboundary cooperation, community-level

²⁰ See ICCD/CRIC(24)/2.

engagement, and the need for country-specific economic assessments to enhance resilience and catalyse action on SDS-related challenges.²¹

V. Conclusion and recommendations

33. The COP may wish to consider encouraging Parties to increase their efforts to implement commitments contained in previous decisions relating to the policy frameworks on gender, land tenure, and sand and dust storms as an integral part of their efforts to combat DLDD, achieve LDN and implement the Convention.

34. The COP may also wish to consider requesting the secretariat and the GM, subject to the availability of resources, to continue their efforts to respond to the ongoing requests contained in the body of decisions for these three policy frameworks.

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW5eeWbgrkQ>.