



Convention to Combat Desertification

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Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels

Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention

Promotion of capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Pursuant to decision 2/COP.16, the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism and relevant partners, has continued to implement targeted capacity-building activities to support the effective implementation of the Convention. Progress has been made in support of the 2026 reporting process, the implementation of LDN TSP 2.0, gender-responsive capacity-building under the Gender Action Plan, media training, the expansion of digital tools, including Earth observation and artificial intelligence, and the development of a comprehensive capacity-building strategy.

The present document reports on activities implemented by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism pursuant to these mandates, as well as complementary activities carried out by the G20 Global Land Initiative. It also contains conclusions and recommendations which the COP may consider, in conjunction with the relevant draft decision contained in document ICCD/CRIC(24)/5, in its deliberations on possible future actions to enhance capacity-building within the Convention.

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I. Introduction

1. At its sixteenth session, the Conference of the Parties (COP) adopted decision 2/COP.16 on the promotion of capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention. In that decision, the COP reaffirmed that capacity-building is a fundamental pillar for the effective implementation of the Convention and the achievement of its strategic objectives, including the land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets and drought resilience.

2. The COP requested the secretariat, subject to the availability of financial resources and in collaboration with the Global Mechanism (GM) and other relevant initiatives, to undertake a series of actions to enhance targeted capacity-building. These include the development of a comprehensive, multi-year capacity-building strategy; the reconceptualization and redesign of the Capacity Building Marketplace; the expansion of online and blended learning opportunities; the promotion of innovation-driven approaches, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI); and the strengthening of gender-responsive and youth-focused programmes. The COP further requested the secretariat to report on the implementation of the decision at the next session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) held in conjunction with the COP (decision 2/COP.16, para. 7).

3. At its twenty-third session (CRIC 23) in Panama City on 1–5 December 2025, the CRIC considered document ICCD/CRIC(23)/6, which provided an initial assessment of the capacity-building landscape of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In its conclusions and recommendations, the Parties at CRIC 23 recognized capacity-building as an essential enabler of transformative change and a prerequisite for achieving LDN, drought resilience, sustainable land management and effective national reporting. Parties noted that, despite notable achievements, capacity-building continues to face enduring structural challenges, including fragmented institutional arrangements, limited coordination, inadequate staffing and persistent shortfalls in predictable, long-term financing (ICCD/CRIC(23)/8, paras. 71–74). Parties also reaffirmed the importance of adopting a coherent and forward-looking capacity-building strategy aligned with the forthcoming post-2030 strategic framework of the Convention (ICCD/CRIC(23)/8, para. 75). By its decision 4/COP.16, the COP established the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention (IWG-FSF), which is tasked with delivering key elements for a post-2030 strategic framework for consideration at COP 17. The outcomes of the IWG-FSF are expected to play a significant role in shaping the future orientation of capacity-building under the Convention.

4. The present document provides information on how the secretariat, the GM and associated initiatives have responded to the requests contained in decision 2/COP.16 since CRIC 23. It also presents an updated assessment of progress, challenges and opportunities, and outlines priority areas for enhancing capacity-building efforts in the lead-up to COP 17.

II. General support for targeted capacity-building

A. Educational outreach and awareness-raising

5. In its continued efforts to raise awareness among school children on the importance of sustainable land management and the impacts of land degradation, the secretariat facilitated an educational outreach session with Grade 7 students at Bonn International School. Delivered at an opportune moment within the children's curriculum on terrestrial biomes, the session introduced key concepts related to land degradation, climate change and ecosystem resilience, while highlighting practical approaches to mitigation, including sustainable land use and reforestation. The interactive engagement enabled students to better understand complex scientific information through accessible and relatable examples, fostering critical thinking and environmental stewardship. The activity further demonstrated the value of connecting scientific expertise with classroom learning, contributing to increased awareness among youth of the importance of healthy land and reinforcing the objectives of the Convention at the local level.

6. On 13 October 2025, the secretariat hosted a group of pupils and teachers from the Russian General Consulate School in Bonn at its premises. The visit brought together 32 participants, including 20 primary school children aged 10-16 years old, accompanied by their teachers. Participants were introduced to the mandate and work of the Convention, with a particular focus on land degradation, its impacts on ecosystems and livelihoods, and the importance of responsible land stewardship. The session provided an opportunity for interactive learning and exchange, fostering early awareness and understanding of land-related challenges among young students.

7. The secretariat, in collaboration with the GM and the G20 Global Land Initiative, and in accordance with their respective mandates, has facilitated and continues to facilitate targeted capacity-building activities responding to capacity needs expressed by Parties and stakeholders. These activities include training, peer learning, knowledge exchange, youth and community engagement, digital tools and restoration-focused initiatives, with the aim of strengthening informed decision-making and practical implementation in support of land restoration, sustainable land management and the objectives of the Convention.

B. Capacity-building lectures, seminars and webinar series

8. Building on an institutional memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Wageningen University and Research (The Netherlands) and the UNCCD and a long-standing collaboration with the LDN Target Setting Programme, on 15 January 2025 and 15 January 2026 the GM hosted full day visits of over 40 students, and 3 academic staff from the Master in Sciences course “Land First – From Promise to Practice”. This master’s course focuses on improving the understanding of graduate students of soil and land health and soil protection, while examining the actors, steps, and challenges involved in implementing soil sustainable land management legislation policies, regulations and practices. The course explores the potential gaps between the policies and implementation in practice, using case-specific studies from LDN TSP 2.0 participating countries and insights from guest lecturers from academia, the private sector, and civil society.

9. Under a 2018 MoU, the Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE) and the UNCCD collaborate on research, education, and career development to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. Central to this partnership is CIFE’s Joint Master in Global Economic Governance and Public Affairs (GEGPA), which integrates expertise from the OECD, the Potsdam Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, and the UNCCD Secretariat. On 19 March 2025 and 25 March 2026, the UNCCD and UNFCCC secretariats co-hosted full-day study visits for over 30 GEGPA students and faculty. These sessions focused on the UN’s role in sustainable development, the Science-Policy Nexus, and climate adaptation through the lens of food, water, and land policy. In addition, workshops held in May 2025 and May 2026 in Nice, France, used simulations and model negotiations to help students explore how evidence-based land-use decision-making can accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. The training entitled “How to Navigate the Legal Structures of COPs: Capacity Building on Negotiations and Environmental Diplomacy” was developed in collaboration with UNEP to strengthen the negotiation capacity of UNCCD Annex III delegates in preparation for COP 17. Held on 24–25 April 2026 in Panama, the workshop combined technical capacity building with peer exchange and networking opportunities, with particular attention to supporting newly arrived delegates. Overall, the training enhanced participants’ ability to engage effectively in negotiation processes, contribute to regional coordination, and support the development and implementation of land-related policies. The training also benefited from the collaboration of the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research (IAI), which provided a brief introduction to Scientific Environmental Diplomacy in the LAC region. The training was attended by 35 participants from 21 countries.

11. In 2025, the G20 Global Land Initiative (GLI), through its International Coordination Office (ICO), significantly expanded its capacity-building efforts to support land restoration. The activities targeted a diverse array of stakeholders —including parliamentarians, educators, youth, faith-based organizations and social media influencers —to strengthen

informed decision-making and achieve the G20's long-term goal of reducing degraded land by 50% by 2040.

12. The Global Changemaker Academy for Parliamentarians (G-CAP) is a flagship program to drive national policy changes. To date, the program has equipped 82 parliamentarians from 49 countries. Six participants have already requested technical support for national legislative processes. In 2025, 29 parliamentarians participated in the five-day intensive training on restoration governance. The training in 2026 will take place in parallel with UNCCD COP17 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

13. Trigger Change! a core pillar of the G20 GLI strategy is the University Curriculum Development Programme, which aims to develop one million new restoration professionals over a decade. G20 GLI launched two major course packages. "Trigger Change! Innovative Sustainable Agriculture Solutions for Land Restoration" launched in 2024 had reached 618 institutions and 18,500 students by end of 2025. "Trigger Change! Innovations in Sustainable Urban Land Restoration", launched in 2025 had reached 185 institutions by year end.

III. Partnership-based capacity-building and technical cooperation in support of implementation

14. Decision 2/COP.16 highlights the need for further collaboration among Convention institutions and associated partners. In response, the secretariat, the Global Mechanism and related initiatives have continued to strengthen partnership-based capacity-building and technical cooperation, including through inter-convention collaboration, South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation, regional and subregional platforms, scientific and technical partnerships, and stakeholder-focused initiatives.

A. Inter-convention cooperation, South-South cooperation and peer learning

15. The secretariat has continued to engage in the Joint Liaison Group of the three Rio conventions. Work under this framework has supported the development of joint capacity-building approaches on cross-cutting themes, including ecosystem-based approaches, sustainable finance and gender-responsive policy. However, financial and human resources to facilitate synergistic approaches remain limited.

16. In line with decision 2/COP.16, paragraph 6 (c), the secretariat has facilitated South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation through regional workshops and communities of practice, thereby strengthening knowledge exchange and peer learning among Parties and partners. Notable examples include the UNCCD SIDS Forum Workshop "Strengthening Land Monitoring, Reporting and Partnerships," held on 29 November 2025, which provided a dedicated space for small island developing States to share experiences, showcase innovative geospatial tools and strengthen collaboration on land degradation monitoring and reporting, and the regional capacity-building workshop on reporting for Annex III, held from 20 to 23 April 2026, which was designed as a peer-learning platform enabling countries to exchange practical experiences, challenges and solutions on reporting implementation. The GM has supported South-South cooperation through the LDN TSP 2.0 and other initiatives.

B. Regional and subregional technical cooperation

17. The 2025 International Training Seminar on Desertification Control Technology and Practices in China brought together 23 officials and researchers from 13 countries across Central and West Asia and Africa. The seminar provided a structured platform for enhancing technical capacities, facilitating peer-to-peer learning and supporting the exchange of practical experiences in addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). In line with the Convention's emphasis on linking science, policy and practice, the training contributed to strengthening the ability of participating countries to apply innovative and context-appropriate solutions.

18. On the margins of the 2025 International Training Seminar on Desertification Control Technology and Practices in China, the secretariat engaged in a bilateral partnership with the National Forestry and Grassland Administration and the Forestry and Grassland Administration of Ningxia, resulting in the agreement, in principle, of a comprehensive programme of work focused on sustained capacity development. The programme foresees the regular convening of joint training seminars, the development and sharing of online learning resources, and the facilitation of participation in intergovernmental processes, including sessions of the CRIC and COP. It also includes provisions for internship opportunities and institutional exchanges, contributing to long-term capacity strengthening and skills development.

19. The secretariat has strengthened collaboration with regional institutions and scientific networks, including through the Regional Liaison Offices. However, limited staffing in those offices – often only one professional officer per Regional Implementation Annex – restricts their ability to proactively support capacity-building beyond periodic engagements.

20. Regional workshops, knowledge platforms and global events have continued to provide important capacity-building opportunities for Parties and relevant stakeholders. These activities supported peer-to-peer learning, the exchange of practical experience and the dissemination of policy-relevant knowledge products, tools and approaches related to sustainable land management, Land Degradation Neutrality and drought resilience. They also contributed to strengthening the capacities of national focal points, science and technology correspondents, members of the Science-Policy Interface and other relevant experts to access, interpret and apply available knowledge in support of national implementation.

21. Capacity-building and technology transfer partnerships were further advanced through engagement in international and regional platforms that facilitated the exchange of scientific knowledge, technologies and practical approaches to addressing desertification, land degradation and drought. During the China-Arab Expo, high-level dialogue and technical seminars provided opportunities to showcase innovative technologies and approaches, while enabling participating countries to exchange experiences and lessons learned. These exchanges contributed to strengthening technical capacities and reinforcing the role of science, technology and innovation in supporting the implementation of the Convention.

22. Efforts to strengthen subregional capacity-building were also undertaken through engagement with the China-Central Asia Cooperation Center for Combating Desertification. Discussions focused on promoting cooperation frameworks for the exchange of technical knowledge, data and practices, with a view to supporting coordinated and context-specific responses to desertification, land degradation and drought across the subregion. Such platforms can help enhance national and subregional capacities by improving access to relevant technical expertise, applied knowledge and practical solutions.

C. G20 Global Land Initiative support to restoration-related capacity-building

23. The G20 Global Land Initiative (G20 GLI), with technical contributions from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), developed the Resilient Agriculture Investment for net-Zero Land Degradation (RAIZ) Mapping Tool. Launched at UNFCCC COP30 in Brazil, the tool places geospatial intelligence at the centre of decision-making for agriculture and land recovery. RAIZ supports the global objective of restoration of 250 million hectares of farmland by 2030, while laying foundations for long-term food systems transformation, and is aligned with the UNFCCC, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. The G20 GLI delivered specialized programmes to address unique geographical and industry needs:

(a) In Africa, the “Building Resilient Landscapes” programme in Senegal focused on sustainable agriculture, attracting over 5,000 applicants and training practitioners in Geographic Information Systems and landscape diagnostics;

(b) In the mining sector, a workshop in South Africa engaged 60 participants from 20 countries on responsible post-mining transitions and land rehabilitation;

(c) In Saudi Arabia, a strategic training for 17 senior officials focused on using geospatial tools and remote sensing for national restoration planning;

(d) In the area of entrepreneurship, 28 entrepreneurs from 14 states in Brazil were trained at Instituto Terra to turn restoration into a scalable business opportunity;

(e) In the area of strategic communication, the G20 GLI, in partnership with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), trained 17 journalists and influencers from 12 countries. Their 2025 content reached over 246,000 accounts, helping move restoration narratives from expert circles into public debate.

25. The G20 GLI actively reached out to the faith community. Faith4Land, a landmark stocktake report, revealed that while 92 per cent of surveyed faith organizations support restoration, major technical and funding gaps remain. These groups influence an estimated 650 million people.

26. Through these multi-layered interventions, the G20 GLI is building the institutional capability and technical skills required to meet global restoration commitments.

D. Knowledge platforms, scientific cooperation and technology transfer

27. The establishment of the International Black Soil Carbon and Sustainable Land Management Research Centre represents a significant step in strengthening scientific and technical capacity related to sustainable land management. The Centre’s development plan includes international cooperation activities for technical exchange, the establishment of monitoring and data-sharing platforms, the development of a scientific think tank, and the promotion of technology transfer. These activities are expected to contribute to building capacities for evidence-based decision-making, applied research and the dissemination of innovative practices related to soil carbon, food security, sustainable land management and land restoration.

28. In addition, a number of memoranda of understanding and partnership arrangements have supported capacity-building, research cooperation and knowledge exchange in areas relevant to the implementation of the Convention. Agreements with Shenyang University, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Wageningen University and the Ningxia Forestry and Grassland Administration focus on sustainable land management research, land-based carbon sequestration, black soil carbon research, education programmes and knowledge sharing. These partnerships provide a basis for strengthening technical expertise, supporting applied research and facilitating the transfer of knowledge and practices to countries and institutions.

E. Data, digital technologies and monitoring partnerships

29. Further collaboration on data-driven approaches was reinforced through participation in the 5th International Forum on Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals. Engagement with technical partners provided an opportunity to explore avenues for strengthening cooperation under existing partnerships, particularly in relation to national reporting, monitoring and data analytics. These efforts highlight the growing importance of digital technologies, big data and geospatial information systems in building national capacities for knowledge generation, reporting and informed decision-making under the Convention.

30. Collaboration on big data and digital technologies has also been advanced through strengthened partnerships with several regional and international institutions, including the International Research Center of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals (CBAS), Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for

Development (RCMRD), Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM), and the Pacific Community (SPC), with memoranda of understanding concluded to support this cooperation. These partnerships emphasize technical support for national reporting, capacity-building and the application of innovative data and digital solutions for UNCCD implementation. Collectively, they contribute to strengthening the capacity of Parties to enhance data management, monitoring and reporting, and to make more effective use of digital tools in support of evidence-based implementation.

F. Drought-related partnerships and communities of practice

31. Technical support on drought risk management has been strengthened through cooperation with Deltares. The memorandum of understanding facilitates collaboration on drought policy, nature-based solutions, the drought-flood nexus and social inclusion in resilience efforts. This cooperation supports capacity-building by helping countries and stakeholders to better understand and address drought risks through integrated, inclusive and science-based approaches.

32. Capacity-building through communities of practice has also been supported through the memorandum of understanding with the Global Water Partnership. This cooperation enhances the UNCCD Community of Learning and Practice on drought management by expanding stakeholder engagement, strengthening the integration and use of data, and promoting further utilization of the UNCCD Drought Toolbox. These activities support continuous learning, knowledge exchange and practical capacity development for drought preparedness and risk management. Further information on the Drought Toolbox and related drought management activities is provided in document ICCD/COP(17)/11.

1. Gender-responsive capacity-building

33. In line with decision 2/COP.16, paragraph 5 (a), the secretariat has continued to support gender-responsive capacity-building through the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and its Road Map. This included support for the participation of women in Convention processes, including through the Women Delegates Fund, and the convening of the Gender Caucus at CRIC 23 as a multi-stakeholder platform for advancing gender-responsive action. These activities contributed to strengthening inclusive participation and integrating gender considerations into capacity-building and implementation support under the Convention.

2. Innovation and digital transformation

34. Innovation under the Convention increasingly relies on the ability to connect scientific outputs, digital technologies and user needs, ensuring that innovation is translated into practical tools and solutions accessible to Parties and stakeholders. Decision 2/COP.16 places strong emphasis on innovation and technology-driven approaches, including the use of AI, to enhance capacity-building (para. 4 (g)).

35. E-learning materials have continued to support blended learning approaches, including through the development and updating of learning resources on LDN monitoring, drought risk management and national reporting. Blended learning, combining online materials with in-person workshops, has been increasingly applied, including in preparation for the 2026 reporting process, in line with decision 2/COP.16. Further updates to the e-learning video tutorials originally prepared for the 2022 reporting¹ process are expected by July 2026.

36. The establishment and operationalization of knowledge-sharing platforms, including the G20 GLI's Global Restoration Information Hub² and Geospatial Data Platform for Land Restoration³ and associated networking mechanisms, represent completed capacity-building achievements. These platforms are already functional and provide access to data, case studies,

¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvHxVdUZA1q0CGTq-otlPTcjUX50oz9g9>.

² See <https://grih.info/>.

³ See <https://www.geogli.com/?view=MX-3MJRU-8XY14-3LPVC>.

tools, and best practices, while facilitating collaboration among governments, researchers, and practitioners. Their continued use in 2026 reflects sustained impact from previously completed capacity-building investments.

37. G20 GLI and the International Trade Centre in 2024 launched the Youth Ecopreneur Programme (YECO), an innovative approach to empower a new generation of entrepreneurs who view land restoration not just as an environmental imperative but as a profitable business opportunity. In 2024, the programme supported 125 ecopreneurs from 42 countries, expanding in 2025 to 225 youth ecopreneurs across 64 countries, reflecting its growing global reach and impact. G20 GLI's Restoration Returns Grants programme targeting community-based organisations completed the 2025 funding cycle with 39 innovative restoration projects from 22 countries selected and supported. The support to NGOs provides financial and technical assistance as well as mentorship, enabling local organizations to build practical skills and implement restoration actions. By 2026, ongoing assessment of these activities shows concrete outputs produced in terms of strengthened local capacities and demonstrated restoration practices on the ground.

38. The secretariat has initiated exploratory work on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for knowledge dissemination, training personalization and decision support. A concept note on AI applications for capacity-building has been prepared, and pilot activities are being considered subject to the availability of resources. Further work is needed to ensure that emerging technologies are effectively integrated into capacity-building delivery and aligned with user needs and national contexts.

39. In line with the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors on the role of the Convention as a bridge between science and policy, innovation-related capacity-building should be further linked to the practical needs of Parties, including through knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation support, partnerships, digital tools and user-oriented scientific outputs. The capacity-building strategy provides an opportunity to consolidate these elements into a more coherent approach that supports implementation while taking into account national contexts and capacities.

IV. Targeted capacity-building activities for National Reporting

40. The submission of timely, comprehensive, and high-quality national reporting via the PRAIS 4 platform is being facilitated, inter alia, through regional capacity-building workshops targeting UNCCD National Focal Points (NFPs), national reporting officers, and other technical experts engaged in the reporting process. A total of seven regional and subregional workshops were planned for the first half of 2026; at the time of writing, four had been successfully conducted, with the remaining three scheduled for delivery. These workshops form part of a broader and continuous approach to providing technical support to countries throughout the 2026 UNCCD reporting process. They are intended to provide a shared foundation by enhancing understanding, strengthening national capacities, and fostering collaboration among national teams, regional institutions, and technical partners.

41. After the workshops, and up until the deadlines for submission of national reports, countries will continue to benefit from customized, on-demand technical assistance delivered by regional institutions or consultants, ensuring continuous support, adaptability to national needs, and consistency throughout the reporting process.

42. In line with decision 2/COP.16, para 6(d) which called for enhanced collaboration with regional institutions to provide data and technical support to country Parties for UNCCD reporting, the secretariat has established partnership with some institutions (hereinafter referred to as "Support Hubs"). These hubs have been at the forefront of delivering decentralized technical backstopping for national reporting, including as co-organizers and trainers for the workshops. A number of institutions, acting as technical advisors, have further assisted the Support Hubs and the secretariat in delivery of their mandate. Together, they have been providing Parties with hands-on support on preparation and submission of national reports through PRAIS, including the use of default and national data, reporting methodologies, and digital tools. This support has contributed to reducing reporting burden,

improving data quality, and promoting peer-to-peer learning at regional and subregional levels.

43. More information on the regional capacity-building workshops and the establishment of an enhanced support architecture for the 2026 reporting process, comprising regional Support Hubs and technical advisory institutions, under the overall coordination of the secretariat, is contained in document ICCD/CRIC(24)/4-ICCD/COP(17)/CST/7.

44. Currently, the engagement and implementation of the Support Hubs are intended as timebound, service-oriented structures, limited to the duration of the reporting process. By contrast, document ICCD/CRIC(23)/6 on targeted capacity-building points towards a longer-term and more strategic vision for capacity development under the Convention. In that context, centres of excellence or knowledge hubs are envisaged as more institutionalized entities with a broader mandate than national reporting, to encompass sustained capacity-building, training of trainers, knowledge exchange, innovation, and support to implementation of the Convention, including on LDN and drought resilience.

45. 45. The document ICCD/CRIC(23)/6 also emphasizes decentralization, regional ownership, and the potential role of regional institutions selected through transparent and criteria-based processes, drawing on experience from other conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. Regional reporting support hubs could evolve and play a role as centers of excellence for broader capacity-building after the pilot for the 2026 reporting process has concluded, but the pathway to do so has yet to be solidified. Any such consideration would need to take into account regional needs, existing institutional capacities, transparent selection criteria, complementarity with Convention institutions and partners, and the need to avoid creating parallel structures.

3. Capacity building for land degradation neutrality monitoring and reporting

46. The Group on Earth Observation Land Degradation Neutrality Flagship initiative:

(a) contributed to strengthening Parties' capacities for the achievement of land degradation neutrality through the Global Dialogue Forum held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, during the UNCCD COP16 in 2024. The forum brought together 11 intersectoral teams from 10 countries to address national LDN implementation challenges through peer-to-peer exchange, hands-on use of geospatial tools and Earth observation data, joint work on integrated land use planning approaches and Earth Observation trainings which were conducted in English, Spanish and French;

(b) in cooperation with the United Nations University, supported the Regional Dialogue Forum for Pacific Small Island Developing States held in Suva, Fiji, in July 2025, which focused on the use of Earth observation and spatial data for sustainable land management, climate resilience, biodiversity conservation and disaster risk reduction, as well as capacity development for monitoring and reporting under the Rio Conventions. Eight country teams participated in the Forum;

(c) achieved significant outreach through the FAO-hosted course "Using Land Cover Data to Monitor Progress towards SDG 15", developed with UNCCD and FAO, which reached over 2,000 participants, including more than 600 women, and contributed to building a critical mass of practitioners able to use land cover data and related tools to support progress towards land degradation neutrality;

(d) strengthened institutional collaboration on capacity development through the GEO-LDN Capacity Development Working Group, now led by the University of the Western Cape and CBAS, including the establishment of the GEO-LDN African Student Chapter to support Earth Observation training and networking for young professionals, the development of big data-driven online tools to support regional land degradation monitoring and restoration efforts, such as Great Green Wall Big Data Facilitator, LDN-Mongolia Plateau, LDN-Arab;

(e) continued operation of the GEO-LDN Helpdesk at the RCMRD and the renewal process of the GEO-LDN postgraduate programme at the University of Energy and Natural Resources in Ghana, thereby consolidating a sustained support structure for Parties working to achieve land degradation neutrality;

(f) organized a series of online-seminars which support country planners and decision-makers in using analytic tools and data for monitoring and reporting on LDN, and provide an exchange platform for data users, data providers and tool developers;

(g) contributed to strengthening capacities for the achievement of land degradation neutrality in Africa through its participation in the 9th AfriGEO Symposium held from 6 to 9 October 2025 in Dakar, Senegal, under the theme “From Data to Impact: Strengthening Africa’s Geospatial Future”, where GEO-LDN representatives engaged in thematic sessions on gender inclusivity and intersectionality and on land restoration and data-driven decision-making, highlighting the role of inclusive geospatial approaches and Earth observation tools in supporting sustainable land management, land degradation monitoring and climate resilience across the continent.

47. These activities demonstrate the value of Earth observation, integrated land-use planning and youth-inclusive capacity development as practical means of supporting Parties in the achievement of LDN, including through peer learning, regional dialogue and the use of accessible geospatial tools.

V. Supporting Parties in achieving land degradation neutrality

48. The GM has continued to support countries in the second phase of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP 2.0). A global capacity-building inception workshop was held in Doha, Qatar (22–24 February 2024), and follow up knowledge exchange webinars took place online (14 November 2024 and 20 November 2025). An enabling activity project on integrating LDN into land-use planning frameworks (hereinafter referred to as integrated land use planning (ILUP) project) was launched under the seventh replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-7), with a capacity-building inception workshop delivered in Johannesburg, South Africa (13-15 May 2025). Project revised activities were presented in four online and in-person events to different stakeholders. The first was an LDN TSP 2.0 online knowledge exchange session on 20 November 2025, involving UNCCD national focal points, LDN TSP 2.0 national consultants and country partner agencies from 18 countries, where the ILUP project was presented as next stage of LDN TSP 2.0 work. The second was a side event at CRIC23 in Panama on 3 December 2025 entitled “One Land many benefits – Fostering synergies across the Rio Conventions through economics and integrated land use planning” where the ILUP project and its contribution to Rio Convention synergies were presented.. The third event was 13th GEO-LDN monthly seminar on 15 December 2025 entitled “Another take on the “I” in ILUP: Integrated Land Use Planning for land, climate and biodiversity action and the geospatial data it needs” where GM-UNCCD perspectives on leveraging ILUP to safeguard land resources and biodiversity were shared with FAO, IRRI, and the broader community. The fourth was an online meeting held on 28 January 2026 with NFPs of all participating countries, providing the first dedicated engagement on project scope and planned activities. Furthermore, in person consultations were conducted back-to-back with the regional capacity-building workshop on reporting in Antalya, Türkiye and Panama City, Panama, where in this meeting, ILUP concept, project details and country examples, survey results and geospatial data compilation were presented.

49. In response to a request from the regional chair for GRULAC, on 13 March 2026 the GM and CAF jointly delivered an online capacity building session for national focal points of Latin America and the Caribbean on opportunities for resource mobilization and access to financing, and the technical support provided by both institutions for the development of project proposals. Also, in the context of the GM-UNDP collaboration under the GEF8 Blue & Green Islands Integrated Programme, on 10 and 11 March 2026 three consecutive virtual technical clinics on “Advancing Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in Small Island Developing States (SIDS): From Concepts to Action” were delivered for SIDS representatives of all regions.

VI. Capacity building for drought and other policy frameworks

50. Capacity-building activities related to drought resilience, including those implemented through the UNCCD Communities of Learning and Practice, are presented in detail in document ICCD/COP(17)/11. These activities contribute to knowledge exchange, peer learning, technical guidance and institutional capacity-building in support of drought monitoring, early warning systems, proactive drought risk management and the development of national drought plans. In 2026, such activities have continued to be implemented through a combination of webinars, regional and global exchanges, technical support processes and links to relevant international events, thereby supporting practitioners and national institutions in strengthening technical skills, sharing practical experience and accessing policy-relevant guidance. They have also contributed to capacity-building for national reporting and policy implementation, including through training materials, regional workshops, technical assistance and helpdesk support related to data analysis, SDG indicator 15.3.1 reporting and drought risk assessment. Through continuous discussion, expert exchange and preparation for major intergovernmental processes, including COP17, these activities help embed capacity-building in sustained collaboration and learning rather than one-off training events.

51. The Drought Toolbox has been updated with new guidance materials, case studies and e-learning modules. These tools are being promoted through regional communities of learning and practice.

52. In line with decision 2/COP.16, paragraph 5 (d), the secretariat has continued cooperation with Parties and relevant organizations on capacity-building to address the impacts of sand and dust storms (SDS). The SDS Toolbox has been further developed, and a new memorandum of understanding with the FAO has been signed to support capacity development under the UNCCD-FAO workplan.

53. Other activities related to policy frameworks further demonstrate the importance of maintaining practical, policy-relevant and user-oriented tools that support Parties in translating guidance related to drought and sand and dust storms into national planning and implementation. Future capacity-building efforts could further strengthen the use of communities of learning and practice, e-learning modules, case studies and regional exchanges to support proactive drought risk management, early warning, preparedness and coordinated responses to sand and dust storms, in line with relevant decisions and subject to the availability of resources.

VII. Development of a capacity-building strategy

54. Following decision 2/COP.16, the secretariat has initiated the development of a capacity-building strategy, in consultation with all substantive units and the Global Mechanism, to mainstream capacity-building across the Convention institutions and other associated initiatives, while emphasizing innovative approaches to help make access to capacity-building easier for Parties and practitioners.

55. Following the same decision, the strategy will also take into account the request of Parties to the secretariat to maintain an annual work programme for capacity development activities undertaken by Convention institutions, the G20 Global Land Initiative and other related initiatives, as well as by external partners for monitoring purposes, and to assess needs for additional resources.

56. Taking into account paragraph 76 of the report of the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (ICCD/CRIC(23)/8), the strategy is being developed with the intention that both the capacity-building strategy and the forthcoming post-2030 strategic framework of the Convention will evolve together, to avoid misalignment and to ensure that capacity-building responds to emerging global environmental, socioeconomic and geopolitical challenges.

57. The strategy will also respond to the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors relating to the Convention's role as a bridge between science and policy,

including through strengthened knowledge management, support for monitoring and evaluation, clearer engagement of relevant expert networks and more systematic use of innovation and partnerships to support implementation by Parties.

58. Development of the strategy is expected to be completed prior to the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties, at which point it will be made publicly available.

59. To ensure a rigorous, evidence-based and participatory approach, the secretariat and a senior international consultant on capacity-building and innovation have set out the development methodology and analytical framework, a detailed stakeholder engagement plan, and a work plan with key milestones. The methodology is designed to draw on robust desk review and synthesis of existing assessments, evaluation findings, national reports and capacity needs assessments, and to ensure systematic consideration of emerging outputs from the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention (IWG-FSF), so as to ensure that the strategy will be sufficiently forward-looking and flexible to accommodate elements of the post-2030 strategic framework.

60. The development of the strategy will begin with a comprehensive stocktaking of the existing capacity-building landscape under the Convention, encompassing the full range of activities undertaken by the substantive units of the secretariat, the Global Mechanism and the G20 Global Land Initiative. The stocktaking will also draw on lessons learned from the Convention on Biological Diversity long-term strategic framework (decision 15/8), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change capacity-building frameworks and the Paris Committee on Capacity-building, the Rio Conventions Joint Capacity-Building Programme steered by the Joint Liaison Group, and the approaches of key implementing partners including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Global Environment Facility, the Green Climate Fund and the World Bank.

61. The stocktaking will be further complemented by an assessment of regional and national dimensions, informed by the perspectives of Regional Liaison Offices, the New York Liaison Office, UNCCD caucuses including those for gender, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and by ongoing monitoring of emerging outputs from the IWG-FSF process.

62. Building on the stocktaking, the secretariat will facilitate inclusive multi-stakeholder consultations involving UNCCD national focal points, science and technology correspondents, civil society organizations including representatives of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women and youth, implementing partners, regional organizations, private sector entities, academic institutions, G20 Global Land Initiative stakeholders, and the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

63. Consultations will be conducted through surveys, webinars and key respondent interviews, and will be coordinated with the IWG-FSF co-chairs and secretariat support team to ensure alignment and identify opportunities for complementary engagement. The synthesis of consultation outcomes will identify capacity strengths, gaps, needs and priorities at the individual, organizational and enabling environment levels, drawing in particular on Parties' national reports, including national action programmes, voluntary land degradation neutrality targets, national drought plans and other national communications, as well as CRIC sessional and intersessional documents and reports on capacity-building.

64. On the basis of the stocktaking and multi-stakeholder consultations, a preliminary strategic framework will be developed and shared for structured review by secretariat units, the Global Mechanism and selected external experts. The preliminary framework will subsequently be presented through a broader validation process, through which consensus areas and outstanding issues will be identified and feedback incorporated. The resulting comprehensive capacity-building strategy and agenda on innovation — comprising a full strategic framework document together with an executive summary and annexes including a consultation summary, glossary and bibliography — will be finalized for publication and presentation to Parties at the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties.

65. The strategy will establish a clear vision and theory of change with high-level capacity results aligned with the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018–2030 and sufficiently flexible to accommodate emerging elements of the post-2030 strategic framework. It will define capacity at three levels — enabling environment, organizational and individual — and will articulate eight guiding principles for effective capacity-building under the Convention:

- (a) context-specific and needs-driven approaches;
- (b) country ownership and commitment, consistent with the Paris Agreement Article 11 principle that capacity-building should be country-driven, based on and responsive to national needs, and foster country ownership;
- (c) strategic and integrated system-wide approaches;
- (d) evidence-based design informed by good practice and lessons learned;
- (e) effective, iterative and participatory approaches;
- (f) gender-responsive and socially inclusive approaches;
- (g) full, effective and meaningful inclusion of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth; and
- (h) integration of monitoring, evaluation and learning from the outset.

66. The intent of this work is to identify a comprehensive set of key strategies to improve capacity-building at all levels, including:

- (a) institutionalization of capacity-building within the Convention and its institutions;
- (b) integration of capacity-building into national action programmes, land degradation neutrality target-setting processes and broader cross-sectoral plans aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- (c) development of thematic - including on drought and land restoration - stakeholder-based and regional capacity-building action plans;
- (d) promotion of partnerships and networks for implementation and consistent with the Paris Agreement Article 11 principle learning;
- (e) enhancement of South-South, triangular and G20–non-G20 member cooperation;
- (f) private sector engagement; and
- (g) strengthening of monitoring, evaluation and reporting of capacity-building interventions.

67. The strategy will also explicitly integrate technology transfer capacity needs in order to operationalize the Model Framework for Technology Transfer under the UNCCD in line with decision 18/COP.16 on knowledge sharing, technology transfer and innovation, addressing absorption capacity, innovation ecosystems, and horizontal and vertical diffusion mechanisms for technology uptake and scaling. Enhancement of synergies with the Convention on Biological Diversity long-term strategic framework, the UNFCCC capacity-building frameworks, the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and other relevant multilateral processes will be identified as a cross-cutting priority throughout.

68. With regard to implementation, the strategy will outline governance and coordination mechanisms at global, regional, national, subnational and local levels, together with key performance indicators to measure progress, resource mobilization approaches including domestic and international financing, regional and global support networks, and an outreach and dissemination strategy.

69. The strategy will underscore the mutual supportiveness of capacity-building with other UNCCD implementation strategies relating to the science-policy interface, knowledge management and resource mobilization. To ensure long-term relevance, the strategy will include a provision for review and revision following adoption of the post-2030 strategic framework of the Convention, so as to maintain full alignment with new goals, targets and

priorities and to ensure continued responsiveness to emerging environmental, socioeconomic and geopolitical challenges.

70. It is anticipated that the completed strategy will constitute a coherent, evidence-based long-term capacity-building strategy and agenda on innovation. Upon its completion and publication, the strategy will be intended to provide strategic guidance to governments, the secretariat, implementing partners, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in strengthening the coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of capacity-building under the Convention.

VIII. Conclusions and Recommendations

71. Innovation and digital transformation are shared priorities for enhancing capacity-building under the Convention, while recognizing the risk of widening technological inequalities. Progress in this area can be advanced through the accelerated integration of digital innovation, including Earth observation, geospatial tools, data platforms, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and early warning systems, supported by sustained investment in digital literacy, infrastructure and long-term technical support. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism and relevant partners and subject to the availability of resources, continue to support accessible, user-friendly and, where feasible, multilingual scientific and technical outputs tailored to national contexts and user needs.

72. General capacity-building support tools, including e-learning, blended learning, training programmes, fellowships, grants, youth-focused initiatives, gender-responsive programmes and communities of practice, have contributed to broadening access to knowledge, technical skills and peer exchange under the Convention. These tools support a wide range of stakeholders, including national focal points, technical experts, young professionals, women delegates, journalists, students, practitioners, parliamentarians, community-based organizations and other relevant stakeholders. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism and relevant partners and subject to the availability of resources, continue strengthening these tools by ensuring their coherence, accessibility, regular updating and alignment with the practical implementation needs of Parties.

73. Partnership-based capacity-building and technical cooperation have become increasingly important for supporting implementation under the Convention. Collaboration through the Rio conventions, South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation, regional and subregional platforms, scientific institutions, technical partners and stakeholder-focused initiatives has contributed to peer learning, knowledge exchange, technology transfer and the dissemination of practical tools and approaches. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism, the G20 Global Land Initiative and relevant partners and subject to the availability of resources, continue strengthening strategic partnerships that support country-driven implementation, regional ownership, scientific and technical cooperation, and the transfer of knowledge and practices to countries and institutions.

74. The lack of predictable, adequate and accessible financing remains a major constraint to scaling up capacity-building efforts under the Convention, particularly in least developed countries, small island developing States and other vulnerable regions. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism and relevant partners and subject to the availability of resources, continue strengthening strategic partnerships and resource mobilization, including through collaboration with regional institutions, the Rio conventions, multilateral development banks, the Global Environment Facility, donors and the private sector, and through South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation.

75. The regional Support Hubs established for the 2026 national reporting process have generated important momentum in strengthening decentralized capacity-building

and technical support to Parties. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism and relevant partners and subject to the availability of resources, assess the lessons learned from this support architecture and explore options for defining the possible future role, scope and modalities of regional hubs or centres of excellence in supporting inclusive, context-specific and decentralized capacity-building, while avoiding duplication and the creation of parallel structures.

76. The capacity-building strategy under development aims to provide a framework to strengthen coordination, reduce fragmented delivery and enhance impact-driven capacity-building across the Convention. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism and relevant partners, continue the development and move towards operationalizing this strategy, ensuring that it provides clear guidance on institutional arrangements, including the possible role of regional hubs, partnerships and support networks, and that it remains aligned with the forthcoming post-2030 strategic framework of the Convention.

77. Capacity-building for drought resilience should continue to support Parties in strengthening drought monitoring, early warning systems, preparedness, proactive risk management and the development and implementation of national drought plans. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism and relevant partners and subject to the availability of resources, further strengthen the UNCCD Communities of Learning and Practice, the Drought Toolbox, e-learning modules, case studies and regional exchanges as practical tools for peer learning, technical guidance and institutional capacity-building.

78. Capacity-building for land degradation neutrality should continue to support Parties in translating LDN targets into implementation, monitoring, integrated land-use planning and investment planning. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat and the Global Mechanism, in collaboration with relevant partners and subject to the availability of resources, further strengthen LDN-related capacity-building through LDN TSP 2.0, GEO-LDN activities, Earth observation and geospatial tools, online seminars, regional dialogue forums and technical exchanges, with a focus on country-driven implementation needs, data use, project development, resource mobilization and monitoring and evaluation.

79. Capacity-building for land restoration should continue to support Parties and stakeholders in moving from commitments and planning to practical implementation, financing and monitoring. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, the Global Mechanism, the G20 Global Land Initiative and relevant partners, subject to the availability of resources, further strengthen restoration-related capacity-building through practical training, technical guidance, knowledge platforms, geospatial tools, youth-focused initiatives, community-level grants, entrepreneurship support, stakeholder engagement and peer exchange, with a focus on context-specific, inclusive and scalable approaches aligned with national priorities and LDN targets.

80. The Committee may wish to recommend that the secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Mechanism and relevant partners and subject to the availability of resources, take into account the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors relating to the Convention's role as a bridge between science and policy when further developing and operationalizing the capacity-building strategy, including through strengthened knowledge management, support for monitoring and evaluation, clearer engagement of relevant expert networks and more systematic use of innovation, digital tools and partnerships to support implementation by Parties.