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Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 8/COP.16, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat and appropriate Convention bodies and institutions to: (i) continue to strengthen existing and seek new partnerships that enhance the implementation of the Convention, address desertification, land degradation and drought, and help achieve voluntary national land degradation neutrality targets; (ii) continue to strengthen collaboration with the secretariats of the other Rio conventions, relevant United Nations entities and other partners to provide practical tools, technical guidance, and capacity-building; and (iii) develop, in partnership with relevant organizations and networks, stakeholder engagement plans. The COP also requested the secretariat and appropriate Convention bodies and institutions to continue to fulfil their respective roles in established partnerships.



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I. Background

1. Decision 8/COP.16 encourages Parties, as appropriate, to leverage synergies at the national level in the planning and implementation processes of the three Rio conventions through integrated actions and approaches, including engaging at the national level to explore opportunities to foster cooperation among the national focal points of the Rio conventions and other relevant international processes to minimize policy fragmentation.
2. The same decision requests the secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to promote the sharing of data collected under each convention, initiate joint science-policy publications, improve countries' access to case studies and lessons learned from projects, pilot projects and programmes linking the objectives of the three Rio conventions, consider building interoperability of information management systems, and promote workshops and awareness-raising efforts for synergies.
3. The decision also requests the secretariat to continue to strengthen collaboration with the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), within their respective mandates, including by exploring common work through the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions (JLG) as well as with other multilateral environmental agreements, relevant United Nations entities and other partners to provide best practices and practical tools, technical guidance and capacity-building related to the implementation of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) policy frameworks.
4. Further, the decision requests the secretariat and appropriate Convention bodies and institutions to continue to strengthen existing and seek new partnerships that enhance the implementation of the Convention, address desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), and help achieve voluntary national land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets, collaborating notably with the Group of 20 Global Land Initiative (G20 GLI), the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality (GEO-LDN) Flagship initiative, the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, the Changwon Initiative, the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA), the Peace Forest Initiative and other complementary initiatives.
5. The same decision also requests the secretariat to continue to support Parties in enhancing coordination among the offices of the national focal points and other key stakeholders, as well as develop and implement, in partnership with relevant organizations and networks, stakeholder engagement plans, including awareness-raising and information dissemination strategies, for policymakers in the public sector, as well as relevant stakeholders, including women, youth, civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, land owners and land managers, the farmer community and pastoralists, the media and the private sector.
6. Finally, the decision requests the secretariat to continue to strengthen the interlinking of the scientific bodies associated with the Rio conventions within their respective mandates (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Science-Policy Interface) and with other relevant data-providing initiatives in order to create the scientific basis for joint target achievement across the conventions.
7. This note provides a summary of a select number of such activities and highlights their efficacy in promoting and strengthening these relationships, as well as enhancing the implementation of the Convention.

II. Synergies with the Rio conventions

8. As part of its mandate, the secretariat continued to strengthen collaboration with the secretariats of the CBD and the UNFCCC through the JLG.
9. In 2025, the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD chaired the JLG. Under UNCCD's chairmanship, the JLG agreed on a cooperation plan for 2025–2026, which focuses on

country support, including a joint capacity-building programme, cooperation on thematic and cross-cutting issues of common interest, and joint outreach.

10. In 2025, the UNCCD secretariat concluded the implementation of a four-year project funded by the European Union that contributed to strengthening the integration of land, climate and biodiversity agendas while enhancing national and subnational capacities for implementation.

11. Thanks to the European Union contribution, a new online platform focusing on synergies between the three Rio conventions was launched in 2025. The website (www.rioconventions.org) highlights the work carried out by the JLG, relevant Presidency-led initiatives on synergies, and Party efforts in promoting synergies at the national level. The website contains a selection of country case studies, an overview of thematic issues that are relevant for a synergistic approach to implementing the three conventions, and country information regarding focal points and commitments. Going forward, the website is expected to be expanded with additional country-level information aimed at bringing together national implementation efforts under the three Rio conventions. Additional information is available at <https://rioconventions.org/>.

12. The joint capacity-building programme of the Rio conventions, supported by the Changwon Initiative, made progress in 2025–2026 with dedicated training sessions for national focal points held on the sidelines of the meetings of the conventions' subsidiary bodies. In addition, several webinars were held in cooperation with partners focusing on various thematic and cross-cutting issues related to Rio convention synergies, such as civil society engagement and rangelands.

13. In the area of resource mobilization, the three Rio convention secretariats and the Global Mechanism (GM) cooperated on preparing a joint flagship initiative focusing on food systems through a Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded project, to be implemented by UNDP, that seeks to align climate, nature and land policy and finance for transformative action.

14. The secretariat has deepened its operational ties with United Nations and other partners to support implementation, particularly through the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP 2.0). These partnerships facilitate stakeholder consultations, technical support, gender integration, and better policy alignment with the other Rio conventions' target-setting processes (e.g. nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans).

15. In terms of visibility, UNCCD contributed to elevating the thought leadership of the Rio conventions through joint op-eds and video messages by the three Executive Secretaries and coordinated several outreach events during Conferences of the Parties and subsidiary body meetings of the Rio conventions, as well as other key international events such as the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and the GEF Assembly.

16. The secretariat also supported and amplified various Presidency-led initiatives on synergies, including the Belem Joint Statement on the Rio Conventions¹ issued at the thirtieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in November 2025 and the Antalya Dialogue for the UNFCCC COP31 Action Agenda in the lead-up to the thirty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in May 2026.

17. The secretariat participated in several other processes focusing on Rio convention synergies, including the Bern Process on the contribution of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) to the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the technical information exchanges on enhancing policy coherence and cooperation between the Rio conventions, organized by the CBD secretariat in 2025 and 2026.

¹ <https://www.unccd.int/resources/other/belem-joint-statement-rio-conventions>.

III. Strengthening collaborations and partnerships

18. The sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) marked a high point in the engagement of new partners and stakeholders in the Convention processes, with the number of newly accredited observers since COP 15 surpassing the number of observers accredited in all years since the adoption of the Convention and the highest-ever number of side events held during COP 16. Following the positive experience in partner engagement at COP 16, a dedicated effort was made to engage the United Nations system and other key partners in the COP 17 Action Agenda and thematic days.

19. In recognition of the growing importance of partnerships to deliver on the Convention's mandate, the UNCCD secretariat actively pursued new collaborations with non-Party stakeholders, while at the same time streamlining internal processes for the formalization of cooperation agreements and conducting appropriate due diligence for new partners. Since COP 16, some 100 new memorandums of understanding (MOUs) have been signed, including with United Nations entities, international organizations, multilateral financial institutions, academic and research institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs) and private sector entities.

20. In the area of United Nations system collaboration, the UNCCD secretariat continued its active engagement in the ongoing United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development 2018–2028 (Water Action Decade),² and the newly launched United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms 2025–2034. The secretariat's engagement activities include the following:

(a) As a member of the Steering Committee for the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, the UNCCD secretariat continued to champion land restoration as a cost-effective solution to the multiple and interlinked planetary crises. The 2025 Desertification and Drought Day hosted by Colombia under the theme "Restore the Land. Unlock the Opportunities" showcased how restoring land can create jobs, boost food and water security, support climate action and build economic resilience;

(b) As part of the Water Action Decade, the secretariat engaged with water-related processes, including participating in the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) and actively contributing to the preparations for the United Nations Water Conference 2026, advocating for the central role of healthy land, drought resilience and ecosystem restoration in addressing water scarcity, climate risks and sustainable development challenges, particularly in drylands and vulnerable regions;

(c) As part of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms, the secretariat has contributed to the development of the Action Plan for the Decade and supported the Coalition's work on policy and outreach, notably around the High-Level Meeting on Sand and Dust Storms organized by the President of the General Assembly in July 2025.³ More information is contained in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/9](#).

21. The UNCCD Executive Secretary participated in the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in December 2025, which provided an opportunity for UNCCD to engage in the UNEA process and participate in the Multilateral Environmental Agreements Day. Adopted at UNEA-7, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Medium-Term Strategy 2026–2029 includes specific provisions on achieving LDN through measures to reduce DLDD and enhance land restoration. As part of regional preparations for COP 17, UNCCD and UNEP also collaborated on capacity-building sessions for negotiations and environmental diplomacy.

22. On the occasion of the UNCCD Executive Secretary's participation in the World Food Forum 2025, the secretariat renewed its long-standing collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through the signing of a new MOU

² <https://www.un.org/en/observances/water-decade>.

³ https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/109/2025/06/HLM-SDS_Concept-Note.pdf.

supported by a biannual workplan focusing on a broad range of collaborations, including with regard to the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, capacity-building, best practices and other activities within the respective mandates of FAO and UNCCD.

23. The secretariat also continued its engagement with the United Nations Environment Management Group as well as the Secretary-General’s UN80 Initiative, specifically on Work Package 27 that focuses on the environmental sector to optimize environmental protection measures within the United Nations system, reduce fragmentation and maximize impact.

24. Through UNCCD-hosted initiatives, notably the G20 GLI, IDRA, the Changwon Initiative and the Peace Forest Initiative, the secretariat and the GM have advanced the following efforts aimed at addressing DLDD as well as helping achieve voluntary national LDN targets:

(a) In 2025, the G20 GLI marked five years since its establishment by the Group of 20 in 2020. With the support of Saudi Arabia, the Initiative continued to advance action to prevent, halt and reverse land degradation, with the overarching ambition of restoring 50 per cent of degraded land by 2040. Key priorities included improving access to country-level land data and decision-support tools, fostering youth and civil society innovation, mobilizing the private sector in the restoration economy, and strengthening policy dialogue among decision-makers. Additional information is available at <https://g20land.org/>;

(b) Since its launch in 2022, IDRA, co-chaired by the governments of Spain and Senegal, has continued to mobilize political, technical and financial capital to enhance drought resilience in countries, cities, and communities. Following COP 16, the IDRA co-chairs, together with the UNCCD COP 16 Presidency as a founding member of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, issued a joint declaration reaffirming their unwavering commitment to building global drought resilience and combating land degradation and desertification. In 2025, Spain renewed its financial support to IDRA. Additional information is available at <https://idralliance.global/>;

(c) The Changwon Initiative, launched by the Republic of Korea in 2011, has played a pivotal role in the implementation of UNCCD over the past 15 years, advancing LDN, promoting science-policy linkages, and empowering communities. The publication titled “Changwon Initiative Success Stories”, launched during the twenty-third meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention, showcased concrete results and lessons learned from the Initiative’s implementation on the ground. A dedicated Changwon Initiative Pavilion was also organized at both COP 16 and COP 17, which provided a dynamic platform to promote dialogue on scaling up innovative and inclusive approaches to land restoration and strengthen global partnerships towards LDN. Additional information is available at <https://www.unccd.int/our-work/flagship-initiatives/changwon-initiative>;

(d) The Peace Forest Initiative, launched in 2019 with the support of a number of Parties, notably the Republic of Korea, demonstrates the interlinkages of land restoration, peace and security. It provides an inclusive platform for stakeholders to co-design, mobilize resources and implement joint activities on land restoration, fostering synergy between land, security and resilience. In this biennium, pilots have been launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia, Ireland, Timor-Leste, and Central Asia, in collaboration with UNDP, FAO, the World Bank and other agencies. With partners including adelphi, the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the GM has organized advocacy events at the Munich Security Conference 2025, the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and Geneva Peace Week 2025, emphasizing the urgency of resource allocation for environmental peacebuilding. Additional information is contained in document [ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/2](#).

25. To assist Parties in using data-driven tools for reporting and informed decision-making, the secretariat has continued to build data-driven partnerships, including under the auspices of the GEO-LDN Flagship initiative. Notably, the secretariat participated in Group on Earth Observations Global Forum 2025 and the meeting of the GEO-LDN Leads in Rome in 2025 to advance UNCCD’s engagement with the Earth observation community to strengthen country capacity for evidence-based LDN target-setting. In parallel, cooperation

with regional and international institutions, including the International Research Center of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory, the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development, the Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management, and the Pacific Community, has been expanded through formalized collaboration arrangements aimed at advancing the application of big data, Earth observation, and geospatial technologies for national reporting and implementation. Additional information is contained in document [ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/4-ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/7](#).

26. In partnership with relevant organizations and networks, the secretariat continued to develop and implement stakeholder engagement plans, including awareness-raising strategies and campaigns. During the reporting period, the following specific initiatives were undertaken that focus on engaging parliamentarians and pastoralists:

(a) In recognition of their key role in policymaking, the secretariat continued its engagement with parliamentarians to leverage their influence to raise awareness about the Convention, create a favourable environment to implement its strategic objectives, and mobilize resources for its implementation at national, regional and global levels. As part of its ongoing engagement with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the secretariat organized a “Legislating for Land” session at the 150th IPU Assembly in Uzbekistan and participated in the 15th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament in Geneva to advocate for greater recognition of women’s land rights. For its part, the G20 GLI organized the Global Changemaker Academy for Parliamentarians in partnership with the United Nations System Staff College, convening over 50 participants in 2025 and 2026;

(b) In support of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) (2026), the secretariat engaged with Parties and partners on the Silk Road Caravan campaign, a landmark journey across several Eurasian countries, including China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Türkiye and Uzbekistan, to symbolically link COP 16 in Riyadh and COP 17 in Ulaanbaatar, shine the spotlight on rangelands and pastoralists, and advocate for greater political support and investment. Additional information is available at: <https://www.silkroadcaravan.org/>;

(c) Desertification and Drought Day 2026 was held under the theme of “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.” The global observance event hosted by Kenya highlighted the central role of the world’s rangelands in climate resilience, food and water security, biodiversity conservation and the cultural identity of pastoralist and Indigenous communities;

(d) Further, the secretariat has collaborated with the Global Alliance for Rangelands and Pastoralists to support the celebration of the IYRP and to ensure that the inputs from the regional and thematic pastoralist gatherings organized by the Alliance could be used to ensure more meaningful engagement within UNCCD. The global gathering of pastoralists, scheduled to take place the week prior to COP 17 in Mongolia, is expected to help in linking the outcomes of the IYRP with COP deliberations.

27. Additional information on the engagement of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, CSOs and the private sector is contained in documents [ICCD/COP\(17\)/3](#) and [ICCD/COP\(17\)/4](#).

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

28. Partnerships remain a cornerstone of global, regional and national efforts to address DLDD. It is important to continue to strengthen existing collaboration with other relevant conventions, institutions and agencies and develop new partnerships with key stakeholder groups that are active and influential in matters concerning land and drought, with a view to progressively involving these groups in UNCCD implementation.

29. The 2026 triple COP year is a strategic opportunity to mobilize political momentum in support of addressing the interconnected and urgent global challenges of land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss, and contribute to the broader sustainable development agenda. In this context, UNCCD is increasingly recognized as a solutions-oriented actor, working with Parties and partners to advance efforts to

restore land and build drought resilience as a foundation of well-being, stability and prosperity.

30. Realizing potential synergies requires coordinated action at national and global levels, including enhanced collaboration, data sharing and financing mechanisms across ministries, sectors and stakeholders at the country level and more closely aligned technical guidance, capacity-building, financial support and monitoring across the Rio conventions and other relevant multilateral environmental agreements and frameworks at the international level.

31. Parties may wish to consider these conclusions when engaging in consultations on a draft decision to be considered by the COP based on the draft text for negotiations that can be found in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/12](#).
