

Draft Elements for Terms of Reference (ToR)

UNCCD Local Communities Caucus

1. Mandate, Purpose, and Scope

Mandate and purpose.

The Local Communities (LC) Caucus is established to support enhanced, meaningful, and inclusive participation of Local Communities, pursuant to Decision 5/COP.16 and in accordance with relevant COP decisions and UNCCD procedures.

The Caucus provides a coordinated interface may contribute perspectives, knowledge, and experience through which Local Communities may contribute perspectives, knowledge, and experience to UNCCD deliberations and implementation-relevant discussions, while respecting the roles of Parties and established UNCCD bodies.

Scope of engagement.

The Caucus operates as a **self-organized observer modality** grounded in self-organization and community-validated participation, supporting the coordination of Local Community inputs across UNCCD bodies, including the Conference of the Parties (COP), the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), and relevant intersessional, regional, and thematic meetings. It engages in liaison with the UNCCD CSO Panel and other relevant platforms, as appropriate.

The Caucus enables sharing of local experience into global policy dialogue and supports transparency, learning, and implementation relevance. It does not exercise formal decision-making authority, consistent with UNCCD observer procedures. It does not exercise decision-making authority within UNCCD processes.

Complementarity.

The Local Communities Caucus is distinct from, and complementary to, any Indigenous Peoples Caucus envisaged under Decision 5/COP.16. Each caucus engages from its own identity and mandate, while collaboration on shared priorities may occur, as appropriate. This distinction is intended to reinforce, not dilute, existing mechanisms for Indigenous Peoples' participation, and to support constructive collaboration based on mutual respect and clarity of roles

2. Membership, Accreditation, and Community Validation

UNCCD procedures.

Participation in the Caucus follows UNCCD accreditation, registration, and observer participation procedures.

Organizations which may affiliate.

Local Communities under the UNCCD include self-identified and community-recognized groups

with shared social, cultural, historical or livelihood ties to the land particularly in the context of land degradation and desertification and drought, who exercise collective stewardship or knowledge practices in their territories, maintain their own forms of representation or governance, and are validated through mechanisms recognized by their community. Criteria for Local Communities include those who exercise collective stewardship or land-related practices, hold and transmit traditional or locally grounded knowledge, maintain customary or community-validated forms of organization or representation. Government recognition may exist where applicable and consistent with community validation in some contexts; participation under these Terms of Reference is not contingent upon such recognition.

Organizations and networks that meet the following indicative conditions may be eligible to affiliate, subject to these Terms of Reference and UNCCD procedure:

- self-identify as Local Community organizations or networks,
- are validated and recognized by their communities,
- endorse these Terms of Reference, and
- participate through an accredited CSO observer in accordance with UNCCD procedures,
- External designation of representatives by non-community actors should be avoided, as it may undermine legitimacy and accountability.

Community-based groups seeking accreditation are encouraged to partner with accredited CSOs and to use UNCCD accreditation guidance, with Secretariat support where needed.

Inclusion and accessibility.

The Caucus may actively support participation of underrepresented groups, as feasible and within available resources. This may include women, youth, elders, persons with disabilities, and communities with limited state presence, through accessible formats, inclusive outreach, and participation practices that are inclusive of diversity.

3. Governance and Regional Focal Points

Principles.

Governance arrangements are non-binding and internal to the Caucus. Arrangements should prioritize inclusivity, transparency, rotation, and the avoidance of undue concentration of influence. Coordination roles are facilitative and procedural, not representative or substitutive of community decision-making.

Regional focal points.

The Caucus selects or designates for two-year terms, through its own consultative processes, regional focal pairs, reflecting regional balance (Africa, Asia, GRULAC, Central and Eastern Europe, WEOG) and aiming for gender and intergenerational balance. Alternative or complementary livelihood based coordination through community-driven regional consultation processes may be considered by the Caucus where appropriate.

Role of focal points.

Focal points act as coordinators and facilitators of the Caucus, and do not speak on behalf of communities beyond agreed procedural coordination. Their functions include:

- coordinating regional inputs and statements,
- facilitating information flow between the Caucus, the Secretariat, and UNCCD bodies,
- supporting inclusive participation and speaking order,
- maintaining concise records and summaries,
- flagging potential conflicts of interest.

Focal points and co-facilitators complete conflict of interest disclosures.

Safeguards to prevent undue concentration of influence.

Task distribution, rotation, transparency of actions, and consultative decision-making should be used to prevent capture or dominance by individuals or alliances.

4. Operating Modalities and Decision-Making**Mode of operation.**

The Local Communities Caucus operates on a voluntary, self-organized, and pragmatic basis. Administrative burden and formalization are kept to a minimum.

Discussions.

Discussions are consultative and participatory, using cooperative or consensus-oriented approaches where feasible. Where consensus cannot be reached, broad regional convergence may be noted for coordination purposes. Indicative quorum thresholds may be considered by the Caucus for internal coordination purposes. Where time sensitive coordination is required (e.g. speaking order), focal points may act within clearly defined, procedural parameters, with prompt ex post communication and opportunity for member feedback.

Meetings.

The Caucus convenes at least once per year in conjunction with the COP and may hold virtual or hybrid meetings as needed, taking into account connectivity constraints.

5. Communications, Transparency, and Participation Support**Communications.**

The Caucus maintains an updated contact list. Agendas are circulated in advance and summaries shared afterward using accessible formats. Communications should aim to use plain and accessible language, visual formats where appropriate, and translation into languages widely used by participating communities, subject to availability of resources of organizations and partnerships affiliated with the Caucus.

Participation support.

Where feasible and appropriate, the Caucus may support:

- translation and interpretation of UNCCD processes into locally accessible language,
- capacity-building and mentoring support,
- peer-to-peer and South–South learning,
- documentation and sharing of local case studies and community practices,
- use of digital media and culturally appropriate formats to broaden engagement.

An annual public summary of activities may be shared, including contributions to UNCCD processes.

6. Traditional Knowledge and Safeguards**Principles.**

Use of traditional and cultural knowledge aims to be ethical, respectful, consent-based, and purpose-limited, in line with free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), as reflected in relevant UN instruments and UNCCD decisions. **Safeguards include:**

- explicit community consent prior to use;
- the ability of communities to withdraw consent or request cessation of use, in accordance with agreed conditions;
- no onward sharing without renewed approval;
- protection of sensitive knowledge and minimization of identifiable data;
- recognition of intellectual property considerations and fair and equitable benefit-sharing arrangements, as appropriate and consistent with applicable legal frameworks;
- accessible feedback, grievance, and redress mechanisms with indicative timelines and points of contact;
- the right of communities to withdraw consent or request cessation of use, consistent with agreed conditions.

The Caucus may explore voluntary, safeguarded repositories or directories of traditional knowledge holders to support responsible consultation and learning, subject to consent and community control.

7. Review and Amendment

These Terms of Reference may be reviewed on a periodic basis (e.g. every two years), or as guided by Parties, to reflect experience, lessons learned, and evolving needs. Amendments are proposed by the Caucus and considered in line with UNCCD guidance. Such reviews may also consider whether institutional arrangements remain fit for purpose, in light of experience and guidance from Parties.