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Summary

This report outlines progress achieved since the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in advancing global drought resilience, in line with strategic objective 3 of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, against a backdrop of intensifying drought impacts worldwide.

It highlights strengthened national drought planning; expanded knowledge-sharing and capacity-building through communities of learning and practice; and enhanced partnerships, including collaboration with the International Drought Resilience Alliance and related initiatives. Progress under the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership as well as developments in innovative financing mechanisms – particularly the Drought Resilience Investment Facility – are also noted. In addition, the report reflects the discussions held under the Tafa'ul Process, led by Saudi Arabia, the COP 16 Presidency, in preparation for COP 17.

Overall, the report underscores the importance of transitioning from reactive crisis response to proactive, systemic drought risk management, leveraging knowledge, partnerships and financing to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems.

The document is structured as follows: (i) Introduction and context; (ii) National planning and policy; (iii) Knowledge-sharing and capacity-building; (iv) Partnerships and cooperation; (v) Financing and private sector engagement; (vi) Tafa'ul Process; and (vii) Conclusions.

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I. Executive summary

1. This report presents progress made since the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in strengthening global drought resilience, in line with strategic objective 3 of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework), against a backdrop of increasing drought severity, frequency and duration driven by climate change, land degradation and unsustainable water use.
2. It highlights advances in national drought planning, with close to 75 national drought plans (NDPs) finalized in line with the UNCCD National Drought Plan Model and the overall framework of the UNCCD Drought Initiative, of which 37 have been authorized by the respective countries and published. These efforts are supported by strengthened institutional arrangements, enhanced coordination across ministries and agencies, and integration of drought considerations into national development, climate adaptation and land management frameworks.
3. Capacity-building and knowledge-sharing have expanded through communities of learning and practice (CLPs) and other global knowledge platforms, facilitating evidence-based decision-making, technical training, and cross-regional exchange of good practices. Strategic partnerships, including the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA) and the Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP), have advanced coordinated approaches to drought preparedness, integrated risk management and policy coherence.
4. Progress in the development of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership (RGDRP) is noted. While the Partnership is not yet operational, substantial preparatory work is well underway to establish it as a platform for strengthening coordination, enhancing country support, and catalysing financing for drought resilience. In parallel, progress is also being made on the proposed Drought Resilience Investment Facility (DRIF), which aims to mobilize blended public and private capital for investments in sustainable agriculture, water infrastructure, nature-based solutions and resilience-building projects. Private sector engagement has grown through the Business4Land Initiative, supporting sustainable land management (SLM), resilient value chains and enabling policy environments.
5. The report also details the discussions held under the Tafa'ul Process, initiated by Saudi Arabia, the COP 16 Presidency, providing a voluntary platform for trust-building, collaboration and preparatory work ahead of COP 17. The Tafa'ul Process complements technical and high-level policy dialogues, including the Open Dialogue on Drought Resilience at the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 23), ministerial briefings at the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, and ministerial meeting held in June 2026, which contributed to shaping a comprehensive global approach to drought resilience.

II. Introduction and context

6. The report is presented at a time when El Niño conditions are emerging and are forecast to strengthen through 2026–2027, with the possibility of a strong or very strong event. Against a backdrop of rising temperatures, widespread land degradation and increasing water stress, such conditions could significantly amplify drought risk, accelerating the transition from meteorological to agricultural and hydrological drought and triggering cascading impacts on food security, water availability, ecosystems and economies. This evolving situation underscores the urgency of strengthening anticipatory action, integrated drought risk management and investments in drought resilience.
7. Drought has emerged as one of the most critical systemic risks to sustainable development, human well-being and the environment. As one of the most pervasive and complex natural hazards, it undermines ecosystem resilience, accelerates land degradation, reduces water availability, disrupts agricultural production and economic activity, and

exacerbates poverty, displacement and instability, with impacts that often cascade across sectors and national boundaries.

8. Extreme drought events recorded across Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe continue to demonstrate increasing severity, frequency and duration, driven by climate change, land degradation and unsustainable water use. Recent assessments indicate that the global land area affected by drought has approximately doubled since 1900, with around 40 per cent of the world's land experiencing more frequent and severe drought conditions. Climate change is increasing atmospheric evaporative demand and altering precipitation patterns, while land degradation and unsustainable water management reduce the capacity of ecosystems and societies to withstand prolonged dry periods.

9. Recent assessments also confirm the growing economic and development impacts of drought across regions. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that the economic cost of an average drought event has increased by between 3 and 7.5 per cent annually since 2000 and could rise by at least a further 35 per cent by 2035 under current trends. In Europe, a recent assessment covering more than 1,100 regions found that severe heat and drought reduced annual agricultural growth by between 1.9 and 7.6 percentage points in the most affected areas. In Latin America and the Caribbean, persistent drought has affected agricultural production, hydropower generation, the water supply, and navigation, while across Africa, prolonged drought continues to place increasing pressure on food systems, water resources and livelihoods. These trends underscore the importance of strengthening integrated drought risk management, sustainable land and water management, and investments in resilience as part of broader efforts to achieve sustainable development.

10. Sustainable objective 3 of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework is to mitigate, adapt to and manage the effects of drought to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems. Achieving this objective requires a transition from reactive crisis response to proactive drought risk management based on prevention, preparedness, improved governance and sustainable land and water management.

11. The present report provides an overview of progress made since COP 16 across five areas: drought policy development; awareness-raising and capacity-building; partnerships and coordination; drought finance and private sector engagement; and informal policy dialogue.

III. Drought policies and national planning

12. The UNCCD approach to drought policy continues to be guided by the three pillars of integrated drought management: (i) monitoring and early warning systems; (ii) vulnerability and impact assessment; and (iii) mitigation, preparedness and response.

13. Building on this framework, the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) have continued to support Parties in strengthening NDPs and promoting integrated and proactive drought risk management.

14. More than 70 countries have finalized their NDPs in line with the model framework provided by the UNCCD secretariat and are advancing their implementation and refinement. Of these, 37 plans are currently available on the UNCCD website, with additional plans expected to be published in due course.

15. With enhanced use of the UNCCD Drought Toolbox, these efforts increasingly focus on operationalizing drought policies by strengthening institutional arrangements, improving coordination among ministries and agencies, and integrating drought considerations into national development, climate adaptation and land management frameworks.

16. National drought planning efforts are further supported through global initiatives such as IDRA, which promotes a shift from emergency response to long-term drought resilience.

17. The secretariat supports the development of a range of knowledge products to help align NDPs with global and national policy frameworks. These tools support countries in integrating drought planning into existing policy and institutional backgrounds, identifying critical gaps

in governance, inclusivity and cross-sectoral coordination, and providing actionable guidance to enhance policy coherence, strengthen resilience and promote comprehensive approaches to drought management.

18. Through IDRA and related initiatives, countries are supported in strengthening enabling policy environments, developing investment-ready strategies and mobilizing financial resources for drought resilience.

19. Complementary initiatives, such as the UNCCD CLPs, further support countries by facilitating knowledge exchange, capacity development and the dissemination of practical guidance for drought risk management.

20. Regional and global dialogues have underscored the importance of strengthening early warning systems, improving drought impact monitoring and establishing national drought impact databases to support evidence-based policymaking. For example, in South-Eastern Europe, countries collaborate through the Drought Management Centre for South-Eastern Europe to strengthen regional cooperation, enhance drought monitoring and early warning systems, and develop a shared regional drought strategy.

21. Africa, like many other regions, faces recurrent droughts of varying duration and severity, with significant impacts on livelihoods, water resources, biodiversity, and ecosystem services. Monitoring these impacts is essential to raise awareness and support timely, evidence-based actions by farmers, communities, policymakers, and risk managers to mitigate impacts, allocate resources efficiently, and protect people and ecosystems. The African Drought Impact Tracker – developed by the Sahara and Sahel Observatory, the UNCCD and the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska – is a tool that allows users to collect and use drought impact data to inform national drought planning, policy development, and awareness-raising efforts.

22. Enhanced drought forecasting, data-sharing and cross-border collaboration are increasingly recognized as essential components of effective drought preparedness.

23. Further, discussions among Parties and partners have also underscored the importance of strengthening the science–policy interface and integrating drought policy into broader resilience agendas, including food security, ecosystem restoration and human health.

IV. Awareness-raising and capacity-building: communities of learning and practice

24. Paragraph 8 of decision 23/COP.15 requests the secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to encourage, support and facilitate CLPs to strengthen collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building for drought resilience.

25. Supported by IDRA, the UNCCD CLPs provide a collaborative platform where practitioners, experts and stakeholders exchange knowledge, build capacities, and co-develop practical solutions for drought risk reduction. Since COP 16, the platform has grown to more than 520 members from 117 countries, hosting 219 events, providing over 100 technical resources, and receiving nearly 400 community contributions. Participation spans academia, governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector, although greater private sector engagement remains a priority.

26. Developed jointly by the UNCCD secretariat, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Global Water Partnership (GWP) and the IDMP, the UNCCD CLPs combine an online platform with community facilitation and social learning approaches that promote peer learning, continuous knowledge exchange, and the practical application of drought management solutions.

27. During the intersessional period, the UNCCD and GWP, together with partners including the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative and The Nature Conservancy, implemented a range of CLP activities, including global calls for contributions, webinars, self-paced online courses, and micro-learning products. A global photo competition attracted 115

submissions from 59 countries, while a call for case studies on investing in drought resilience received 35 submissions showcasing innovative financing approaches. Selected case studies were presented at CRIC 23, promoting peer learning and evidence-based investment in drought resilience.

28. Webinars remained a central CLP activity, increasingly led by 14 regional Co-Chairs who shaped programmes around members' priorities. Twelve webinars attracted more than 1,020 participants and addressed topics including drought policy, biodiversity, financing, regional challenges, and country experiences. Regional learning exchanges across Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean promoted practical experiences in drought policy, monitoring, governance, financing, and resilience planning while strengthening regional cooperation.

29. Self-paced online courses have become a key component of the CLP's capacity-building programme. The first course on drought risk and impact assessment enrolled more than 740 participants, with 122 completing the programme and reporting increased knowledge and confidence in applying drought risk assessment methods. A second course on drought risk mitigation, preparedness, and response has been developed through a collaborative expert process and is planned for launch at COP 17, further strengthening technical capacity and supporting the transition from knowledge to implementation.

30. Overall, the CLPs have become an important mechanism for advancing drought resilience by strengthening technical capacity, promoting collaborative learning and knowledge exchange, supporting policy dialogue, and fostering more integrated and proactive approaches to drought management. Continued efforts should focus on strengthening its integration within UNCCD processes and expanding participation from underrepresented stakeholders, particularly the private sector.

V. Partnerships and coordination

31. The secretariat has continued to strengthen partnerships aimed at scaling up drought resilience globally. Collaboration with governments, United Nations entities, research institutions, and regional organizations has supported coordinated approaches to drought preparedness, risk management, and resilience-building.

32. IDRA continues to provide a high-level political platform to promote coordinated drought policies and investments. Spearheaded by the Government of Senegal and the Government of Spain and launched during the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, IDRA seeks to mobilize political momentum to integrate drought resilience into national development planning and international cooperation frameworks. During the reporting period, IDRA has contributed to the work of the secretariat in different areas, including financial contributions to the work of the CLPs. This supports the production of knowledge products and catalyses the mobilization of financial resources by investing in the development of innovative financial mechanisms. IDRA has been instrumental in generating the background analyses and supporting the processes that have led to the creation of DRIF in collaboration with the Government of Luxembourg and the design of the RGDRP in collaboration with the Government of Saudi Arabia.

33. IDRA members, together with other international partners, have been working closely with the secretariat to develop the International Drought Resilience Observatory (IDRO), a global platform for harmonized drought resilience monitoring and analytics. IDRO is envisaged as the operational arm of the RGDRP. It will strengthen integrated drought risk assessment by transforming complex and fragmented data into accessible indicators, policy-relevant insights and actionable information on drought risks, impacts and resilience options. As an integrative observatory, IDRO brings together data, methodologies and analytical tools from leading scientific and operational partners, translating them into outputs that are directly usable by policymakers and practitioners.

34. Collaboration has continued with partners, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, WMO, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Environment Programme and UN-Water, as well as regional drought observatories and technical institutions.

35. The secretariat has also engaged with the Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture, contributing to its Steering Committee and supporting coordination across initiatives addressing drought, water scarcity, and sustainable land and water management.

36. The secretariat has contributed to global policy discussions on drought resilience, including through technical inputs to international policy platforms and forums. During the reporting period, the secretariat contributed technical expertise to international processes shaping future environmental financing frameworks, including consultations related to the ninth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-9), which covers July 2026–June 2030.

37. In February 2025, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Secretariat convened Technical Advisory Groups composed of scientific experts, development practitioners, and representatives of international organizations to provide strategic inputs for programming directions under GEF-9. Discussions within the land degradation focal area highlighted the importance of strengthening investments that address underlying drivers of land degradation, enhance ecosystem resilience, and support sustainable land and forest management. Particular attention was given to drought-related programming under the GEF portfolio, including large-scale regional programmes and national projects aligned with NDPs.

38. The consultations emphasized the importance of adopting systemic and integrated approaches to improve drought resilience, including stronger linkages between land management, water governance, food systems and ecosystem restoration.

39. The GEF-9 programming cycle emphasizes drought resilience in its programming directions, underscoring the importance of integrated, landscape-level approaches that connect SLM with socioeconomic outcomes, with a focus on improving food security, supporting resilient livelihoods, and sustaining ecosystem health, particularly in dryland regions.

VI. Drought finance, investment and private sector engagement

40. Addressing drought effectively requires significant investment in preparedness, risk reduction, and resilience-building. However, current global financing remains heavily concentrated on emergency response rather than on prevention and preparedness, limiting opportunities to reduce vulnerability and strengthen long-term resilience.

41. Evidence indicates that investing in resilience generates substantial economic benefits, with every dollar invested potentially yielding up to three dollars in avoided losses and reduced humanitarian costs.

42. The GM supports countries in translating drought strategies and land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets into transformative projects and programmes designed to generate environmental, economic and social benefits.

43. These initiatives aim to mobilize diverse sources of funding, including public finance, development finance institutions, and private capital.

44. The RGDRP, launched at COP 16 in Riyadh, contributes to these efforts by providing a global platform to strengthen coordination, enhance country support and mobilize finance for drought resilience. The Partnership promotes a dual financing approach, combining upstream readiness support for strategies and investment pipeline development with downstream financing for concrete projects and programmes. Currently in an advanced establishment phase, the RGDRP is progressively operationalizing its governance and institutional and funding mechanisms, with initial readiness support expected to be launched to support countries in translating drought plans into investment strategies and projects.

45. Innovative financing approaches are being advanced to help close the substantial investment gap in drought resilience. A key initiative in this regard is the proposed DRIF, a blended finance vehicle designed to mobilize public and private capital for investments that enhance drought resilience, support land restoration, and strengthen climate adaptation efforts. With the support of Luxembourg and IDRA, the GM has been spearheading the development of DRIF, with its official launch anticipated at COP 17. DRIF is envisaged to be hosted within the Luxembourg Earth Impact Fund and is targeting an initial capitalization of USD 300–400 million.
46. DRIF aims to unlock private sector investment in sustainable agriculture, water, and nature-based solutions and technologies for drought-prone areas. DRIF will be the first global fund of its kind dedicated to drought resilience to use concessional capital to de-risk projects and attract commercial finance for equity investments in transferable and scalable drought resilience technologies and businesses. In 2025, the GM secured EUR 2 million from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg to assist in establishing DRIF.
47. Another such initiative that the GM is working on is insurance mechanisms, including parametric and index-based products, which protect vulnerable farmers and communities from drought shocks, enabling rapid recovery and the adoption of sustainable practices. These approaches are based on the premise that healthier land reduces exposure to drought shocks and that the integration of measurable SLM practices, including soil restoration, water management, agroforestry, and sustainable grazing, into insurance design can improve insurability and resilience outcomes.
48. Initial pilots and feasibility studies are being undertaken across multiple regions, including Africa and Pacific small island developing States, with further exploration in additional geographies. Next steps will include resource mobilization for pilot implementation, strengthening partnerships with technical agencies and the insurance sector, and further developing methodologies and data systems to support scaling.
49. Discussions within the GEF Technical Advisory Groups also highlighted the need to strengthen financial instruments supporting drought resilience, including blended finance approaches, innovative insurance mechanisms, and new investment vehicles aimed at mobilizing both public and private capital.
50. Participants emphasized the importance of linking drought policy frameworks with investment planning and national budgeting processes. Attention was given to ensuring that national drought strategies are operationalized through concrete financing mechanisms and multisectoral investment plans.
51. Experts further highlighted the need to develop robust monitoring and indicator frameworks to assess the environmental, economic and social impacts of drought-related investments. This includes strengthening global indicators capable of capturing the multidimensional nature of drought impacts, including effects on agriculture, food systems, migration and rural livelihoods.
52. In the context of ongoing dialogue in preparation for COP 17, discussions also identified opportunities to strengthen partnerships supporting national drought policy implementation and capacity-building.
53. Engagement of the private sector is increasingly recognized as essential for achieving LDN and strengthening drought resilience.
54. The Business4Land Initiative promotes collaboration between the UNCCD and private sector actors to support SLM, resilient value chains and innovative financing solutions, encouraging companies to adopt sustainable business practices, support land restoration and drought resilience, and advocate for enabling policy environments.
55. Private sector participation reached unprecedented levels during COP 16, demonstrating growing recognition of the role of businesses in addressing land degradation and drought risks.

56. Strengthening partnerships among governments, international organizations, and private sector actors is therefore critical to scaling up investment, accelerating innovation and supporting the implementation of national drought strategies.

VII. Informal policy dialogue: The Tafa'ul Process

57. The Tafa'ul Process was initiated by the President of COP 16 following the COP, held in Riyadh in December 2024.

58. At COP 16, Parties reaffirmed their commitment to addressing drought through long-term and sustainable approaches, including initiatives such as the RGDRP, the World Drought Atlas and IDRO. Despite progress, consensus on a global drought resilience instrument was not reached.

59. In response, the Tafa'ul Process – named after the Arabic word *تفاؤل*, meaning constructive optimism and hopeful determination – was established as a voluntary and informal dialogue mechanism with the aim of fostering collaboration, rebuilding trust and exploring pathways towards a shared vision for global drought resilience in advance of COP 17.

60. The process intended to bring together representatives from 25 countries spanning all UNCCD regional groups, alongside five internationally recognized experts who provided insights on scientific frontiers and emerging issues from a global perspective. Emphasizing reflection, relationship-building and constructive dialogue rather than formal negotiation, the process was supported by the UNCCD secretariat and facilitated by external experts with extensive experience in multilateral processes.

61. The first meeting of the Tafa'ul Process was held in Panama City from 26 to 28 November 2025. Participants welcomed the Process as a space for open dialogue, reflection and maintaining momentum towards COP 17.

62. An Open Dialogue on Drought Resilience was subsequently held during CRIC 23 in Panama, providing a platform for countries and partners to exchange perspectives, showcase good practices and strengthen collaboration.

63. A high-level ministerial briefing was also organized during the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in December 2025. Ministers highlighted drought resilience as a systemic and transboundary challenge and emphasized the importance of proactive drought risk management.

64. The second meeting of the Tafa'ul Process was held in Bonn, Germany, from 9 to 11 February 2026. Discussions focused on identifying areas of convergence and exploring pathways for strengthened cooperation in advance of COP 17. Participants reaffirmed the urgency of addressing increasing drought impacts and the importance of enhanced coordination across initiatives.

65. The third and final Tafa'ul Process meeting convened technical experts and ministerial representatives in Cairo, Egypt, on 5–6 June 2026. Building on previous rounds of consultations, the discussions helped clarify areas of convergence and divergence on key aspects of drought resilience, including governance arrangements, financing and institutional pathways. The meeting underscored the broad recognition of drought as a systemic global challenge and reinforced the importance of sustained engagement among Parties.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

66. Drought is a systemic risk that is increasing in severity, frequency and duration due to climate change, land degradation and unsustainable water use.

67. Addressing drought requires a transition from reactive crisis response to proactive risk management.

68. Significant progress has been made in national drought planning, with more than 70 countries engaged in developing or implementing NDPs.
69. Effective drought management depends on strengthened monitoring systems, improved early warning mechanisms and comprehensive impact assessment.
70. Capacity-building, knowledge exchange and further growth of the CLPs remain central to strengthening national and local drought resilience.
71. Strategic partnerships with governments, United Nations entities, research institutions, and regional organizations continue to advance integrated drought risk management.
72. The work of IDRA, the RGDPR and DRIF is helping enhance the international financial landscape for drought resilience and could support countries through readiness financing, investment support and knowledge exchange.
73. The Tafa'ul Process, convened by the COP 16 Presidency, offered an informal and voluntary platform for dialogue and trust-building among Parties in preparation for COP 17.
74. Considering the above progress, Parties may wish to consider the following recommendations:
 - (a) Prioritize proactive drought risk management and integrate it into national development, climate adaptation, and land and water management frameworks;
 - (b) Strengthen drought monitoring, early warning systems, impact assessment and the science-policy interface;
 - (c) Scale up capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and people-centred approaches to drought resilience, building on the excellent progress already achieved through the CLPs, while further strengthening, expanding and sustaining these platforms to enhance peer learning, collaboration and the exchange of practical experiences;
 - (d) Mobilize innovative and sustainable financial public and private resources to support the implementation of national drought strategies and drought resilience investments;
 - (e) Enhance partnerships and coordination across global, regional and national initiatives;
 - (f) Operationalize the outcomes of COP 17 and support the effective implementation of NDPs through the generation of investment strategies and promotion of cross-border cooperation on drought resilience;
 - (g) Support the engagement of the private sector in drought resilience processes, projects and activities.
75. Parties may also wish to consider these conclusions as well as the progress achieved at COP 16 in Riyadh, as reflected in the annex to decision 24/COP.16, with a view to preparing a draft decision for COP 17.