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Programme and budget for the biennium 2027–2028

Report on the performance of Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies (2025–2026)

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document presents the progress made by the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) toward the objectives and outcomes of the UNCCD four-year results framework (as contained in decision 1/COP.16), assessed against the outcome indicators contained in the results framework. This document also provides brief descriptions of the accomplishments and main activities carried out during the 2025–2026 biennium by each programme of the secretariat and the GM.



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I. Introduction

1. The secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) plan, carry out and monitor progress in their work by using a results-based management approach. In line with this approach, at the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16), they presented a results framework of 14 outcomes, as well as related outcome indicators, which were approved by the Conference of the Parties in decision 1/COP.16. The results framework covered all activities that the secretariat and the GM were to carry out in 2025–2026, regardless of the funding source.
2. This performance report presents the results achieved by the secretariat and the GM in 2025–2026, building on the results framework contained in decision 1/COP.16. The report provides an overview of performance highlights, followed by information on the progress made toward the outcomes of the results framework. Brief descriptions of the accomplishments and main activities carried out during the 2025–2026 biennium by each programme of the secretariat and the GM are also presented. Most of the information in this document reflects the status as at the end of May 2026; where available, also more recent information is included.
3. This document should be read in conjunction with information on the financial performance for the Convention trust funds in 2025–2026, which is contained in document ICCD/COP(17)/INF.3.

II. Main results in 2025–2026

A. Performance highlights

4. In the 2025–2026 biennium, the secretariat and the GM have succeeded in delivering major achievements in terms of advancing cooperation and partnerships for implementation, involving new stakeholders, and gaining media attention, among other things.
5. Land degradation neutrality (LDN) is now pursued worldwide, with 116 countries having completed their national voluntary LDN targets. Of these, 108 countries are working with the GM through the Partnership for Project Preparation (PPP), with the aim of translating their LDN targets into bankable national and/or multi-country projects. To ensure that the LDN targets are adequately specific and of high quality, 14 countries have refined their targets, and 4 more have almost done so, while 26 other countries are waiting to start the process as soon as the GM has resources available for that purpose.
6. Since COP 16, the preparation of the LDN targets and the projects to implement them has resulted in 22 projects being approved for implementation by different partners participating in the PPP. The total financial value of these projects is approximately USD 1.48 billion, comprising USD 226 million from the targeted source of funding and USD 1.25 billion from co-financing. In addition, 29 further project concept notes and/or project documents are under preparation, with estimated funding of USD 770 million if approved. This would bring the total funding leveraged by the GM for projects on LDN to almost 2.25 billion.
7. The secretariat and the GM succeeded in advancing the protection and restoration of land in many other ways. Advocacy and campaigning for the recognition of the ecological, economic and social value of rangelands generated commitments and attention worldwide, notably through the Silk Road Caravan that has so far reached at least 200 million people online and generated over 1,000 media articles, garnering major attention in Arabic, Chinese and Russian-speaking areas. Other important triggers and “enablers” of action and finance targeting land degradation have included numerous guidelines, trainings, policy advocacy events, briefings and tools on gender equality and land tenure, which have been produced by the secretariat and the GM in collaboration with expert partners. Sand and dust storm (SDS) source mitigation is a major land management measure for many countries in the world, and the development of the Global Implementation Initiative on Sand and Dust Storms, which

was led by the UNCCD, will serve the members of the United Nations Global Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms in enhancing related action.

8. Over recent years, Parties have established a solid consensus on the measures needed for addressing drought under the UNCCD, with a focus on proactive work: strengthening early warning, assessing drought vulnerability and impact, and mitigating drought risk. Although Parties have yet to agree on the format of such a UNCCD framework, the secretariat and the GM have worked actively with many partners to have in place effective means to implement the identified proactive measures for drought resilience-building. The International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA) continued its effective advocacy and policy support, and progress was made in the operationalization of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership (RGDRP), with its first call for proposals planned for early 2027. The International Drought Resilience Observatory was further developed, and its second phase will be launched at COP 17. The GM worked on the establishment of the Drought Resilience Investment Facility (DRIF), aimed at facilitating private investments through de-risking, which will be launched at COP 17. The secretariat continued its support to the communities of learning and practice on drought, whose membership tripled from 150 to 450 since 2024, and worked with partners on several publications, briefings and webinars on different aspects of addressing drought. Particularly notable is the guidance on integrating aridity trends and drought planning into adaptation across the action planning frameworks in all Rio conventions and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030).

9. COP 16 saw an unprecedented rise in involvement of non-governmental stakeholders, and the maintenance and further expansion of that involvement is critically important for effective action on land and drought. Since COP 16, the GM has worked through the Business 4 Land (B4L) Initiative and with many partners, with the aim of promoting land-positive, drought-resilient private sector investment decisions and practices, the establishment of land- and drought-related targets, and the integration of sustainable land, soil and water management into corporate reporting frameworks. Over 300 private sector entities are registered to the B4L process, including some major global companies. At the 2026 World Economic Forum, the B4L Champions' Council was established, involving twelve high-level corporate leaders¹. National B4L hubs are being established in two major economies, to foster private sector engagement in mobilizing investment, fostering innovation and scaling sustainable land management and restoration.

10. With regard to other stakeholders, the secretariat has continued supporting the Civil Society Organization Panel (CSO Panel) and facilitated arrangements for launching the Caucus for Indigenous Peoples and the Caucus for Local Communities.

11. The growing stakeholder interest in protecting and restoring land and addressing drought through the UNCCD process is reflected in the statistics on applications received from entities to be accredited to the COP: for COP 16, 437 applications were received, while for COP 17, that number more than doubled as at 31 May 2026 (890 applications). The number of applications to organize side events at COP 17 was more than 700, nearly twice the number of applications to COP 16 (381). Another indication of the growing attention to the UNCCD and its priorities is apparent in outreach statistics: UNCCD website users increased from 790,000 in 2024 to 2.4 million in 2026, and in the same period, the UNCCD social media following almost doubled from 172,000 to 318,263.

12. The 2025–2026 biennium was not only marked by many major achievements, as highlighted above, but also by an increasing uncertainty of the ability to continue delivering important achievements due to the unexpected shortfall of core budget contributions and the resulting decline in some key human resources. Out of 45 staff positions under the core budget, the secretariat and the GM had to freeze 5 to avoid overspending their resources. Some further core budget positions that became vacant through retirement were not filled before COP 17, but related recruitments are to be started soon.

13. As may be noted from the achievements listed in this section, despite this continuous gap between the expected and the available number of staff has not the secretariat and the GM have succeeded in delivering significant results in this biennium. It has, however, taken

¹ B4L Champions Council

a heavy toll on the remaining UNCCD staff, many of whom have assumed duties that go far beyond their job description and exceed any normal working hours. This is not a sustainable approach.

14. In the scale of most United Nations system entities, including the other Rio conventions on climate change and biodiversity, the UNCCD secretariat and the GM are small in size and thereby also rather inexpensive to maintain for their member countries. In recent years, along with the growing attention and political commitment to land and drought matters, the secretariat and the GM have been able to mobilize significant voluntary funding and partnerships that have enabled steady progress toward the Convention objectives. However, most voluntary contributions provide very small or no allocations for human resources, which means that the “thinking” behind these activities as well as the management of resources is covered mainly by the core budget staff. Continuation of progress in advancing LDN, restoring rangelands and protecting soil health, materializing the commitments to build drought resilience, and securing the needed resources and partnerships for countries to continue implementation require, as a precondition, an adequate number of core budget staff.

15. Furthermore, the ability to deliver ambitious decisions that may be adopted at COP 17, notably those of involving more the private sector, uplifting the financial architecture around land, further working on rangelands and agricultural lands as a new topics under the UNCCD, and securing the future functioning of the SPI, will require filling all approved UNCCD core staff positions for the coming years.

B. Progress toward the outcomes of the results framework

16. The below table presents the expected main outcomes of the secretariat and the GM in 2025–2026, as contained in the results framework approved at COP 16. These outcomes reflect the expected positive change thanks to the work of the secretariat and the GM. Progress made toward each outcome is presented as performance data against the outcome indicators that were also approved at COP 16 as part of the results framework.

17. The 2025–2026 results framework deploys almost exclusively quantitative indicators. Their scope is limited, providing only a snapshot of the progress made and, for some, there is no previous information to serve as a baseline. The presentation of the results by programme in section III below provides more information, and many topics are also presented in detail in specific COP, Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and Committee on Science and Technology (CST) documents.

Table

Progress toward the 2025-2028 outcomes of the results framework

<i>2025–2028 main outcomes</i>	<i>Outcome indicators</i>	<i>Performance data</i>
1. Improved enabling environment to reduce desertification and land degradation	Number of countries supported in setting voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets	2024: 112 countries set LDN targets. 2026: 4 new countries set LDN targets. 124 countries (two thirds of all countries in the world) have now committed to developing LDN targets, and 116 of them set their targets.
	Number of countries supported in implementing the second phase of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP 2.0)	2024: 18 countries participated in the programme 2026: 14 finished refining their LDN targets, and 4 are in the final stages of completion. 26 countries are interested in joining the programme and have been placed on the LDN TSP 2.0 waiting list, pending the availability of additional resources.
	Number of operational Peace Forest Initiative programmes	3 programmes are underway, 1 is under development, and pilots involve 8 countries.

2025–2028 main outcomes	Outcome indicators	Performance data
2. Improved preparedness for and resilience to the impacts of drought	Extent of partnerships supporting the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) drought agenda	The Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership governance structure is established; the implementation of the partnership is planned to start in 2027. Second phase of the International Drought Resilience Observatory will be launched at the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17). The International Drought Resilience Alliance continues its work, engaging numerous countries and organizations.
	Number of information products and tools concerning drought that are produced or upgraded	One modular self-paced training course was launched at the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 23), and a second course is under development. Seven webinars were held under the communities of learning and practice on drought. An aridity adaptation supplement to the National Adaptation Plan Technical Guidelines published by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was developed. An update of the Drought Snapshots will be published at COP 17.
	Number of users of the communities of learning and practice on drought in all regions	2024: approximately 150 members 2026: approximately 450 members
	Number of countries supported in translating drought plans into a prioritized investment strategy	2024: None 2026: Drought investment plan development initiated in 3 countries, 3 more countries will be supported in 2026.
3. Gender equality integrated into UNCCD implementation	Cumulative number of transformative projects, developed with support from the UNCCD, that include interventions promoting gender equality	2024: 7 project concepts with gender components 2026: 25 approved project proposals or expressions of interest, 6 submitted project concept notes or proposals, and 18 project concept notes or proposals under development include gender components.
	Number of information products and tools concerning gender equality that are produced or upgraded	- World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies project for the development of a gender-responsive sustainable land management assessment tool - 2 training modules and/or events: gender-responsive land management planning; and gender and drought - A joint Rio conventions briefing on gender-responsive synergies - Women delegates negotiation training prior to CRIC 23, and another one planned prior to COP 17 - Second UNCCD gender parity report under development
	Number of male and female staff in the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM)	Ideally, 40–60 per cent of UNCCD staff are women. At the moment, the share of women is 61.25 per cent, and 3 out of 5 positions at the level of a director or above are held by women.
4. Secure tenure integrated into UNCCD implementation	Cumulative number of transformative projects, developed with support from the UNCCD, that include interventions promoting secure tenure	No core budget resources have been provided for this purpose, and while discussions are ongoing with some donors, so far no projects have been initiated.

2025–2028 main outcomes	Outcome indicators	Performance data
	Number of information products and tools concerning secure tenure that are produced or upgraded	Refined business case on land tenure Land Tenure Toolbox, consisting of six modules (Principles and Guidelines, Knowledge and Awareness, Women's Land Rights, Grievance Mechanisms, Finance and Monitoring, and Partner Resources), will be launched at COP 17 3 regional land tenure webinars Second strategy workshop on Women's Land Rights and the Rio Conventions Inputs to "The Status of Land Tenure and Governance" report, which provides information on data and reporting on tenure systems, land distribution, governance frameworks, women's land rights, and customary rights Model Restoration Law (through the Group of 20 Global Land Initiative Coordination Office Global Changemaker Academy for Parliamentarians)
5. The UNCCD is an active partner in global collaboration on sand and dust storms (SDS)	Number of inputs into the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms (2025–2034) involving the UNCCD	Development of the Global Implementation Initiative on Sand and Dust Storms Inputs to the Decade action plan, the high-level event of the President of the General Assembly on SDS, and the development of the United Nations Secretary-General's Framework for the Decade (to be launched at COP 17) UNCCD lead role of the policy and governance working group of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms
	Number of information products and tools concerning SDS that are produced or upgraded	Update of the Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox, including an inventory of tools, technologies and good practices for SDS source management and revision of the module on source detection (identifying and mapping SDS sources) An online learning exchange event to mark the 2025 International Day of Combating Sand and Dust Storms
	Number of countries supported in developing SDS assessments	No staff or resources were available for this purpose.
6. UNCCD decision-making and implementation guided by up-to-date science-policy information	Extent of the Science-Policy Interface work programme implemented	75 per cent completed as at 31 May 2026. The work programme will be fully implemented by the end of the year.
	Number of UNCCD guides, reports and policy briefs	Main reports: Eco-connectivity (Global Land Outlook (GLO)), Renewable Energy and Sustainable Land Management, Global Land Restoration Economy, Urban–Rural Linkages and Land, Scaling Carbon Finance for Land, Livelihoods and Long-Term Resilience, Changwon Initiative Success Stories, Drought Hotspots, Gender Issues in Post-Mining Land Restoration (case study) Several region-specific reports and guidelines To be published at the Conference of the Parties: GLO reports on Central Asia and small island developing States, updated Global Drought Snapshot, and a five-year status report of the Great Green Wall Initiative/Sahel, among other publications.

2025–2028 main outcomes	Outcome indicators	Performance data
7. An updated UNCCD performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS)	Extent of updates made to the reporting platform	All planned updates to the online system were completed, including a country overview dashboard, more user roles and privileges, an embedded chat application, revised quality assurance, form annotations, auto-generated notifications, the ability to switch between default and national data sources per table, and clearer documentation of metadata, among others.
	Number of capacity-building events and individuals trained in reporting modalities	282 individuals from 181 countries trained through 5 in-person workshops
	Number of new or upgraded data sets, information products and tools for reporting that are made available to countries	11 new or upgraded geospatial datasets and 3 information products updated
8. A bigger profile for the UNCCD on the global agenda through strategic communication	Number of media reports referencing land and drought issues and the UNCCD	Desertification and Drought Day 2024: 1,757 articles 2025: 3,870 articles 2026: approximately 3,000 articles
	Engagement on UNCCD digital channels (number of website visits, downloads and social media followers)	Website users: 2024: 790,000 2026: 2.4 million UNCCD social media following: 2024: 172,000 2026: 318,263
9. Growth in strategic partnerships and stakeholder engagement in support of the UNCCD	Number of accreditations to the COP	COP 16: 437 COP 17: 890 (as at 31 May 2026)
	Number of new strategic partnerships/collaborations per year	15 new strategic partnerships finalized by 31 May 2026; 5 more under preparation
10. Enhanced resource mobilization by the secretariat and the GM	Extrabudgetary resources received per year for the implementation of the UNCCD workplan	Voluntary resources received as transfers to the respective accounts between 1 January and 31 December: 2024: USD 30,409,034 2025: USD 28,964,002
	Total funds raised by the secretariat and the GM and their partners for projects and initiatives addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD)	22 projects supported by the GM were approved for implementation between November 2024 and May 2026. Their funding totals to approximately USD 1.48 billion, comprising USD 226 million from the targeted source of funding and USD 1.25 billion from co-financing. 29 project concept notes and/or project documents are under preparation, with a budget of USD 770 million. Should they also be approved, the total amount mobilized (i.e. 51 projects in total) would be USD 2.248 billion, comprising USD 845 million from targeted sources of funding and USD 1.403 million from co-financing.
	Number of donor countries/organizations engaged by the secretariat and/or the GM	6 new donors were engaged, and some existing donors increased their contribution.
11. An accelerated pipeline of flagship programmes and projects	Cumulative success rate of proposals approved versus proposals supported	The success rate is approximately 33 per cent.

2025–2028 main outcomes	Outcome indicators	Performance data
to mobilize financing for DLDD		Since 2018 and as of May 2026, the GM portfolio includes: (a) 38 active national projects; (b) 25 active regional or multi-country projects; and (c) 3 global projects.
	Cumulative total budget of proposals approved	USD 1.48 billion (22 approved projects since 2024)
	Cumulative number of proposals supported that contribute to the implementation of country commitments to the three Rio conventions	2024: No proposals 2026: Only one proposal is specifically on synergies: “Strengthening Rio Synergies: Aligning Climate, Biodiversity and Land Policy & Finance through Food Systems” Under the LDN TSP 2.0, all refined LDN targets received guidance on integrating synergies in implementation. Many project concepts supported under the GM Partnership for Project Preparation (PPP) have elements that directly contribute to the implementation of the other Rio conventions, such as focusing on climate-smart agriculture or management of invasive species.
	Cumulative number of partners engaged to support project preparation, piloting and execution through the PPP	New partners engaged in 2025–2026: 11
	Cumulative number of multi-country/regional project design capacity-building workshops convened with multisector focal points	Southern Africa Great Green Wall Initiative multi-country/regional project design capacity-building workshops convened with multisector focal points Zambezi multi-sector workshop (in the context of a Climate Investment Funds project) Several country-level or subregional workshops related to specific projects
12. Enhanced private sector engagement with the UNCCD and on land issues	Cumulative number of private sector entities mainstreaming land/drought in a recognized environmental, social and governance framework/reporting process	GM has established a partnership with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) towards building capacity among business entities to use GRI Standards to identify, assess and act on drought and land-related impacts while strengthening drought and land-relevant indicators and metrics in the GRI Standards. This has involved 18 private sector entities.
	Cumulative number of partnerships established with private sector entities	Private sector partnerships and engagement has taken many forms, for example: - 135 private sector entities have applied for accreditation to the COP; - 301 entities have registered/expressed interest to join the Business4Land Forum; - 14 company representatives are “champions” for Business4Land (B4L) - The Youth Ecopreneur Programme has trained 225 entrepreneurs under 35 years of age Partners that have been working on various aspects of UNCCD private sector engagement include the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the World Economic Forum, the International Chamber of Commerce, the Sustainable Fiber Alliance, the Science Based Targets Network, the International Trade Centre, Ernst & Young and GRI, among others.
	Cumulative amount of private and innovative finance leveraged	At the moment, there is no adequate information available to respond to this indicator.

<i>2025–2028 main outcomes</i>	<i>Outcome indicators</i>	<i>Performance data</i>
	Number of dialogue meetings organized with the private sector or philanthropic foundations	The B4L Initiative hosted a three-day strategic workshop involving 40 business leaders, investors, corporate standard-setters and technical experts. The workshop included field demonstrations on regenerative agriculture, hosted by the Finck Foundation. Events and meetings involving the private sector were organized on the sidelines of several international conferences and meetings. The next B4L Forum, a Fashion4Land event and a Mining Sector Forum will be organized at COP 17, along with several other events involving the private sector.
13. The secretariat and the GM operate effectively	Per cent of COP decisions targeting the secretariat and/or GM implemented	COP 16 made 37 decisions, which contain a total of 181 tasks addressed to the secretariat and/or the GM. Of these, 175 (97 per cent) have been completed or will be completed by the end of 2026. It should be noted that many tasks in the COP decisions are either continuous in nature or formulated as general requests or invitations to do something, and they are defined as completed when related action is being taken. Those 6 tasks that are marked as not completed mainly refer to activities that are postponed for a reason (for example, the work on gender and tenure indicators will start once the consideration of the post-2030 strategic framework advances), or that have not been implemented to the extent planned at the beginning of the biennium.
	Number of official UNCCD meetings, including those of the Bureaux, organized in a timely and efficient manner	One COP session, meetings of four subsidiary bodies (CRIC 23, CRIC 24, seventeenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology, and the Committee of the Whole) and 14 Bureau meetings
	Per cent of staff having participated in training	100 per cent (briefings on the integrated budget approach; mandatory trainings on disability inclusion, information security and addressing racism; training prior to COP 17)
14. The administration of the secretariat and the GM functions efficiently and in accordance with United Nations rules	Per cent of budget spent	60.4 per cent as at 31 May 2026
	Extent of improvements recommended by auditors	Compared to the 2023 Board of Auditors report, the corresponding 2024 and 2025 report sections of the financial audit do not contain more recommended improvements (in number or severity). There are some recommendations of programme audits that focus on better definition of tasks and improved coordination among different units, especially between the secretariat and the GM, for ensuring complementarity and avoiding duplication.

III. Main results by programme

A. Management and governance

1. Executive Office

18. The Executive Office (EO) coordinates the secretariat in the support provided to the Convention bodies and ensures the overall effectiveness and coherence of the work of the secretariat. The Executive Secretary, through cooperation with the Deputy Executive

Secretary and the Director of New York Liaison Office (NYLO), provides strategic direction for the secretariat and the GM and represents the organization externally. They consult with Parties, coordinate cooperation with other organizations and reach out to stakeholders worldwide to encourage their commitment to the objectives and implementation of the Convention.

19. In 2025–2026, the EO focused on building and further strengthening global commitment and partnerships to implement effective action for drought resilience-building, and for further recognition of land restoration as a socioeconomic as well as environmental priority. Particular emphasis was placed on highlighting the role of healthy land and soil in producing food and as the basis for most industries. The importance of restoring rangelands and agricultural lands was underlined, including in the context of meeting the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNCCD and the GM work related particularly to ensuring progress towards food security.

20. Internally, the EO continued to develop the secretariat into a top-performing organization with solid expertise and recognized efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Due to an exceptional shortfall in core budget contributions, several core budget positions were not filled, and the remaining staff had to cope with heavy additional workload. The EO aimed to focus and prioritize activities to ensure that its limited resources are used in an optimal manner while fully responding to the mandate given by Parties. The EO enhanced coordination and information-sharing among units and took measures to maintain good team spirit and staff well-being in the demanding times.

21. The Evaluation Office, which reports to the Executive Secretary, facilitated internal learning for improved effectiveness and, through the evidence-based measurement of results, assisted in improving the transparency and accountability of the secretariat and the GM. The Evaluation Office commissioned two independent evaluations and further improved the follow-up to the implementation evaluation recommendations.

22. Reporting to the EO, NYLO ensured the visibility of UNCCD issues in United Nations bodies and events of high political importance, notably the General Assembly and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. NYLO undertook targeted outreach to constituencies at the United Nations Headquarters and provided information on UNCCD matters to United Nations Member States, regional groups and interest groups, such as the Group of 77, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing States (SIDS). NYLO also assisted the Group of Friends on DLDD and promoted land-related partnerships and initiatives involving various stakeholders, notably youth, women, civil society and academia.

23. The office prepared the annual report on UNCCD activities presented to the United Nations General Assembly through the United Nations Secretary-General and contributed to other relevant reports on sustainable development. In its resolution A/C.2/80/L.54 in November 2025, the General Assembly welcomed the decisions made of COP 16, called for their full implementation, and also underlined the importance of many provisions made in those decisions, among other matters. In that resolution, the General Assembly also decided to include in the United Nations calendar of conferences and meetings for the year 2026 and subsequent years, the sessions of the COP and its subsidiary bodies, and requested the Secretary-General to continue to make provisions for those sessions in the proposed programme budgets.

2. Governing Bodies and Legal Affairs

24. The Governing Bodies and Legal Affairs (GBLA) programme is in charge of planning and general coordination of the sessions of the COP and its subsidiary bodies, and other core meetings of the UNCCD process. It assists the Executive Secretary in advising the President and Bureau of the COP, coordinates secretariat support for related activities and provides institutional, procedural and legal advice.

25. In 2025–2026, GBLA planned and prepared the twenty-third meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 23), held in Panama from 1 to 5 December 2025, and the meetings of the COP, the CRIC and the CST,

which will be held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 17 to 28 August 2026. The programme established the Host Country Agreements with Panama and Mongolia and coordinated the preparation of the conference facilities plan with the host countries. It liaised with the United Nations for conference services to be provided from the United Nations regular budget and processed all documentation for the official sessions. It also organized, for the first time, a briefing of the diplomatic corps for the United Nations in Geneva, informing them of the main topics and priorities, procedures, and the upcoming COP 17 of the UNCCD.

26. For CRIC 23, 8 pre-session documents and 1 post-session document were processed and submitted to the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) for translation in all United Nations languages by the requested deadlines. Three information documents were issued in English only. For COP 17 and the subsidiary body meetings to be held in Ulaanbaatar, 24 pre-session documents have been processed and submitted to UNOG for translation in all United Nations languages by the requested deadlines. Nine information documents were issued in English only.

27. During the meetings, GBLA coordinates the provision of technical and procedural support for the COP and its subsidiary bodies, which includes: (i) identifying emerging issues pertaining to the intergovernmental process and the mandates of the secretariat; (ii) analysing the implications and making corresponding procedural recommendations; (iii) developing scenarios for and scheduling the proceedings of plenary meetings; and (iv) preparing speaking notes for the respective chairpersons. The programme coordinates the provision of guidance and advice to the Chairs as well as to other elected officers on the organization of work, status of negotiations, conduct of business, and rules of procedure; and supervises the conduct of proceedings for the conference. It is in charge of preparing the official programme of the meetings and summaries of proceedings for inclusion in the daily Official Journal of the session. It also prepares the reports on proceedings of the COP and its subsidiary bodies.

28. Although one key the position of this programme, that of a legal officer, was frozen, GBLA continued to review the legal aspects of all Memoranda of Understanding, agreements and other similar formal documents prepared by the secretariat and the GM, as well as responding to queries of legal nature received from Parties.

B. Secretariat programmes

1. Global Policy Advocacy and Regional Cooperation

29. The Global Policy Advocacy and Regional Cooperation (GPARC) programme develops policy frameworks for effective decision-making and the accelerated implementation of the Convention. Its mission is to prepare and deliver persuasive policy messages that elevate DLDD as a political priority and support national efforts in implementing the Convention objectives. As part of GPARC, the Regional Liaison Offices (RLOs) facilitate cooperation and outreach within and among regions, encouraging partnerships, advocacy and coordination under each Regional Implementation Annex.

30. During the biennium 2025–2026, GPARC focused on the provision of evidence-based policy guidance, tools and capacity-building for the following critical factors for the effective implementation of the Convention:

- (a) Drought resilience;
- (b) Rangelands;
- (c) Integration of gender equality into UNCCD implementation;
- (d) Secure tenure rights as an enabler of effective land restoration;
- (e) The potential of land restoration to promote food security, create jobs and prevent forced migration;
- (f) Urban–rural linkages;
- (g) Sand and dust storms source mitigation;
- (h) Enhanced regional advocacy, collaboration and information-sharing.

31. In support of the EO, GPARC continued promoting high-level global commitment to building drought resilience, strengthening existing partnerships and forging new ones in support of inter-agency collaboration, coordination and information-sharing for effective action on integrated drought risk management.

32. Capacity-building and knowledge-sharing expanded through communities of learning and practice, whose membership grew globally from around 150 in 2024 to 450 in 2026, and other global knowledge platforms. These platforms facilitated evidence-based decision-making, technical training, and cross-regional exchange of good practices. Strategic partnerships, including IDRA and the Integrated Drought Management Programme, advanced coordinated approaches to drought preparedness, integrated risk management and policy coherence. GPARC participated actively in the development of the RGDRP. The programme also supported the Tafa'ul Process, initiated by Saudi Arabia as the COP 16 Presidency, providing a voluntary platform for trust-building, collaboration and preparatory work on addressing drought under the UNCCD ahead of COP 17.

33. For gender equality in the implementation of the UNCCD, GPARC collaborated with several partners for advancing the implementation of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan (GAP) and building related capacities of countries. Training and/or workshops were organized on topics such as gender and restoration, gender gaps in UNCCD implementation, women-led solutions for drought resilience, and gender-responsive synergies across the Rio conventions. The second phase of the UNCCD–World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) project on a gender-responsive sustainable land management (SLM) assessment tool was completed, including a number of guides to support the application and implementation of the tool in project and programme contexts. The UNCCD Women Delegates Fund became active, supporting 14 women delegates to participate in a two-day in-person negotiation training in prior to CRIC 23. At CRIC 23, the GPARC convened two in-session Gender Caucus meetings.

34. On promoting secure land tenure, GPARC, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), developed the Land Tenure Toolbox. It is composed of six modules: Principles and Guidelines; Knowledge and Awareness; Women's Land Rights; Grievance Mechanisms; Finance and Monitoring; and Partner Resources. Three regional land tenure webinars were organized to present the Toolbox, with a specific focus on grievance mechanisms related to land tenure. The webinars promoted the sharing of experiences, as well as updates on tenure data sets and indicators and women's land rights. GPARC also conducted awareness-raising activities on good land governance to address DLDD and contributed to selected events and consultations concerning land tenure.

35. Regarding SDS, GPARC maintained its active collaboration with the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms and participated in the preparation of the Global Implementation Initiative for Sand and Dust Storms. This Initiative, led by the GM, seeks to assist Parties in addressing and better managing anthropogenic SDS sources and contributing to the implementation of the action plan for the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms (2025–2034). GPARC also updated the SDS Toolbox.

36. Regarding rangelands (and pastoralists), GPARC advanced global awareness, knowledge and investment in rangelands and pastoralism through regional dialogues with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), contributing to the Silk Road Caravan campaign. Four information briefs were published, including one on women herders and pastoralists. These efforts helped promote the integration of rangeland solutions into climate, biodiversity, and land restoration agendas. GPARC also strengthened the evidence base for action through contributions to Rangelands Rising and WWF's From Roots to Riches programmes, while supporting the launch of the GM-led rangelands flagship initiative at COP 17. The initiative aims to mobilize greater investment in the conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of rangelands through knowledge generation, resource mobilization and institutional collaboration.

37. For enhanced regional collaboration, the RLOs focused on four major areas or work:

(a) Representation and advocacy of the Convention, its objectives and its benefits for Parties in the regions;

(b) Regional policy and coordination, with the aim of supporting Regional Implementation Annexes in exchanging views, identifying topics and measures of shared interest, and carrying out joint action to implement the Convention;

(c) Partnership-building and resource mobilization for the specific requirements and needs of the various Regional Implementation Annexes; and

(d) Capacity-building and communication support, allowing the different regions to properly advocate for their priorities within the framework of the Convention to other regions and stakeholders.

38. Key activities during the biennium 2025–2026 have included the identification of key stakeholders to support collaboration and engagement in the different regions, and outreach and advocacy towards these stakeholders. Outreach, capacity-building and supporting Parties to advance the implementation of the UNCCD also continued.

39. Throughout the biennium, the RLOs strengthened UNCCD’s regional engagement, policy influence, and visibility by systematically monitoring political, economic, environmental, and development trends and translating them into strategic intelligence for the secretariat and the GM. The development and dissemination of regular regional briefs provided timely analysis of emerging regional priorities, opportunities and risks, helping to position drought resilience, land restoration, and SLM within broader agendas on economic resilience, food security, water governance, climate adaptation and geopolitical stability.

40. RLOs maintained continuous engagement with Parties, regional institutions, development partners and other stakeholders through online consultations, bilateral exchanges, and regional coordination meetings. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring regular communication with Parties, supporting preparations for COP 17, promoting synergies among the Rio conventions and advancing regional priorities related to drought resilience, land restoration, and financing for implementation.

41. To expand outreach and knowledge exchange, the RLOs organized and supported a series of webinars, virtual briefings, and awareness-raising events, facilitating peer learning and dialogue among governments, experts, regional organizations, and partner institutions. These platforms helped disseminate information on regional developments, promote best practices, strengthen regional cooperation and enhance awareness of UNCCD initiatives and COP 17 preparations.

42. The RLOs also strengthened collaboration with key regional organizations and processes, including regional economic commissions, intergovernmental organizations, financial institutions and technical networks. These partnerships contributed to raising the profile of land degradation and drought issues within broader regional agendas and supported efforts to mobilize political commitment, technical expertise, and investment opportunities.

43. Overall, the biennium was characterized by sustained regional engagement, enhanced strategic analysis through monthly regional briefs, continuous communication with Parties and stakeholders through online consultations and webinars, and strengthened partnerships that helped position land restoration and drought resilience as key components of regional development, resilience and sustainability agendas.

2. Communications, External Relations and Partnerships

44. The Communications, External Relations and Partnerships (CERP) programme comprises the following areas of work: (i) strategic communications, including outreach and media relations, digital communications and knowledge management; and (ii) external relations and partnerships, including partnership development, engagement with non-Party stakeholders such as civil society organizations (CSOs), the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, academia, the private sector, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and local governments, as well as donor relations and corporate resource mobilization.

45. During the 2025–2026 biennium, the main aims and focus areas of CERP were as follows:

- (a) Increase the profile of UNCCD on the global agenda through strategic communication;
- (b) Ensure growth in strategic partnerships and stakeholder engagement in support of the UNCCD;
- (c) Enhance resource mobilization for the implementation of the UNCCD workplan.

46. CERP sought to raise the profile of the Convention and its priorities, increase audience engagement, and deliver high-impact outreach campaigns. Central to this period were the annual observances of Desertification and Drought Day (DDD), the Silk Road Caravan campaign in support of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) (2026), and the mobilization of new influential voices in support of the Convention.

47. Awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement activities are carried out throughout the year at the global, regional and national levels to ensure broad participation and concrete commitments for land restoration, drought resilience and sustainable livelihoods.

48. The 2025 DDD global observance event was hosted by Colombia under the theme “Restore the land. Unlock the opportunities”, highlighting the urgent need to restore 1.5 billion hectares of degraded land by 2030 and unlock a trillion-dollar restoration economy. It demonstrated how restoring nature’s foundation – land – can create jobs, boost food and water security, support climate action and build economic resilience. Some 70 events were held worldwide to mark the DDD, while associated media coverage represented a 65 per cent increase over 2024.

49. The 2026 DDD was organized in Kenya with the theme of “Rangelands. Recognize. Respect. Restore”, with another 70 events taking place worldwide to mark the day. The total volume of coverage was 15,400 mentions, a 161 per cent increase compared to 2025, including ca. 3,000 unique articles. The global observance, held in the Vipingo Central Primary School in the presence of Kenya’s Deputy President and Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Forestry, the UNCCD Executive Secretary and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, sought to position rangelands not only as ecosystems but as the foundation of food systems, climate resilience and stability. The event showcased Africa’s leadership in land restoration, with a spotlight on regional initiatives such as the Great Green Wall (GGW) and emerging cross-regional rangeland partnerships, thus strengthening Africa–Asia collaboration ahead of COP 17.

50. Since its start in May 2026, the Silk Road Caravan, a symbolic and physical journey connecting COP 16 and COP 17 in support of the IYRP, has travelled over 6,000 kilometres across Türkiye, the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and China. Pastoralists from some 30 countries across all regions, as well as UNCCD Goodwill Ambassadors and Sport4Land Champions, took part in the journey, which will culminate in Mongolia at COP 17. The Silk Road Caravan received formal endorsement from the FAO as the secretariat of the IYRP, and several other international and national partners. A documentary film is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. The campaign has reached at least 200 million people online and generated over 1,000 media articles so far, with Arabic, Chinese and Russian becoming more prominent in the total share of UNCCD media coverage.

51. The UNCCD campaigns and DDDs aimed to highlight successes by UNCCD Parties and stakeholders in the implementation of the Convention, including at-scale land restoration and drought resilience initiatives, and underscore the urgency of addressing DLDD as well as the environmental, human and economic costs of inaction. They represented key opportunities to place land issues high on the global agenda and reach new audiences, further increasing the impact of outreach programmes and actively contributing to the implementation of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) and the United Nations Decade on Combating SDS (2025–2034). Furthermore, they strengthened partnerships and the capacity for raising the visibility of land issues and the UNCCD and mobilized new and influential voices in support of the Convention’s objectives and related advocacy and communications activities, including UNCCD Land and Goodwill Ambassadors, Sport4Land Champions and Land Heroes.

52. The UNCCD Land and Goodwill Ambassadors, including Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland, Byong Hyon Kwon (Republic of Korea), Ricky Kej (India), Baaba Maal (Senegal) and Inna Modja (Mali), lent their powerful advocacy and global reach in support of key UNCCD events and initiatives, including the #HerLand campaign on women's land rights in 2025, the Silk Road Caravan journey in 2026, and annual DDD observances. Following COP 16, the Ambassadors collaborated on a joint film project titled "Living Desert", which premiered at the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025.

53. The Sport4Land Campaign uses the unifying power of sports to combat land degradation and drought by engaging high-profile athletes and their global fan bases. Following its launch at the 2024 Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Sport4Land Campaign culminated at COP 16 with the formal appointment of a diverse group of Sport4Land Champions, including elite athletes Assmaa Niang (Morocco), Jitske Visser (Netherlands), Naomi Akakpo (Togo), William Troost-Ekong (Nigeria) and Franck Kessié (Cote d'Ivoire). In 2026, a new champion, Su Yiming (China), became the first Sport4Land Champion from Asia. High-impact public service announcements released in conjunction with the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations and the FIFA World Cup 2026 reminded fans that "every second, we lose the equivalent of four football fields of healthy land".

54. Despite the lack of dedicated funding, the UNCCD continues to engage its existing network of Land Heroes and other youth leaders. A social media campaign titled "What is your hope for COP 17?" was launched 100 days prior to the COP to help promote meaningful engagement of youth in the Convention's processes.

55. Digital engagement continues to drive the Convention's outreach, with website users increasing from 790,000 in 2024 to 2.4 million as at the end of June 2026. However, additional investments are required to ensure the continued performance of UNCCD's digital infrastructure. The Convention's social media following also showed dynamic growth, increasing from 172,000 followers in 2024 to 380,000 in 2026 across its main channels. Multimedia products, especially short videos, saw the highest audience engagement.

56. In recognition of the growing importance of partnerships to deliver on the Convention's mandate, CERP continued to coordinate UNCCD efforts to effectively establish and lead partnerships. This also involved the development or update of related internal procedures and policies, leading to more streamlined processing of partnership documentation. Since COP 16, some 100 new memorandums of understanding (MOUs) were signed, including with United Nations entities, international organizations, multilateral financial institutions, academic and research institutions, CSOs and private sector entities.

57. The streamlined approach of the management of collaborations with partners has also led to a strengthened collaboration with, among other entities, the FAO through the conclusion of a new MOU on the occasion of the World Food Forum 2025, which includes an extensive joint workplan, to be reviewed biannually.

58. Active outreach and collaboration continued with stakeholder groups that are critical for the effective implementation of the Convention. Following the request and mandate given by Parties², the CERP programme continued its support of the CSO Panel to ensure their active participation in implementing the Convention at all levels, coordinating the engagement of their constituencies, sharing relevant information for civil society and leading the engagement of non-governmental actors that support the implementation of the Convention. As a result of the outreach, the number of CSOs accredited to the UNCCD has increased significantly since the last session of the COP. For COP 16, 437 requests for accreditation were achieved; for COP 17, the number of requests as at 31 May 2026 was 890.

59. The unprecedented participation of Indigenous Peoples representatives at COP 16 led to the drafting of the Sacred Land Declaration and a COP decision requesting the preparation of terms of reference (TOR) for the creation of a Caucus for Indigenous Peoples. CERP engaged with members of the United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues and consulted with Indigenous Peoples organizations about the creation of the UNCCD Caucus for Indigenous Peoples. In the follow-up to the same COP decision, the secretariat has been

² Decision 5/COP.16

working with partners, including local communities, to assist in the development of the TOR for the creation a Caucus for Local Communities. Information on the two processes and their outcomes is contained in document ICCD/COP(17)/3.

60. To expand synergies, partnerships and stakeholder involvement in all aspects of the Convention, CERP continued engaging United Nations entities, international organizations and multilateral environmental agreements, including the Rio conventions, to promote synergies in addressing the interconnected crises of land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change. CERP also continued serving the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) of the three Rio conventions, chaired by the UNCCD Executive Secretary in 2025, with the aim of enhancing information-sharing and collaboration on topics of mutual interest. A new online platform (<https://rioconventions.org/>) was launched in September 2025, providing up-to-date information on initiatives led by COP Presidencies and the JLG in the area of Rio conventions synergies, as well as case studies from countries. The platform also collates information regarding national implementation from the three Conventions.

3. Science, Technology and Innovation

61. The Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) programme supports scientific cooperation, facilitates national reporting and the related review process, and manages the data submitted by Parties. STI is also in charge of planning and general coordination of the meetings of the two subsidiary bodies of the Convention and the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI). In addition, the programme supports capacity-building and spearheads the innovation agenda.

62. In 2025–2026, scientific cooperation was mostly supported through the CST and its SPI. The STI supported them by preparing the meetings of the CST and its Bureau, as well as those of the SPI and its working groups, and by coordinating collaboration between the Bureaux of the CST and CRIC on methodological matters of reporting.

63. The results of the COP 16 review of the SPI and the science outcomes from the midterm evaluation of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework) suggested that future work programmes of the SPI may be scheduled to last two intersessional periods (usually four years) to focus on two objectives: (i) the delivery of the Global Land Outlook (GLO) products or similar high-profile, science-based flagship reports; and (ii) the development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice.

64. Accordingly, and following decision 20/COP.16, the main substantive activities of the SPI in the 2025–2026 work programme involve taking the scientific lead in the development of the third edition of the GLO (GLO 3). Due to the timeline between COP 16 and COP 17, the SPI effectively had fewer than 12 months for scoping, conducting the scientific assessment and preparing the draft GLO report, compared with the approximately 36 months for the previous GLOs. 36 months is also foreseen for the preparation of next GLOs or similar reports under future quadrennial work programmes. Nevertheless, GLO 3 is currently being finalized, and its main points are summarized in documents ICCD/COP(17)/CST/6 and ICCD/COP(17)/CST/INF.1. It will centre on a proposed land stewardship framework, which is a practical expression of an ethic of care for land and a guiding principle for transformative change in the valuation, governance and management of land and water resources for people and the rest of nature, across present and future generations.

65. With regard to other elements concerning the future functioning of the SPI, the CST Bureau, in collaboration with the SPI and with the support of STI, prepared updates for various modalities and procedures. These included modalities for the renewal of the SPI membership, the terms of reference for members and observers of the SPI, procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests put to the SPI for its work programme, and procedures for the preparation of flagship reports and for the development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice. The STI commissioned a feasibility study to identify ways of ensuring adequate technical support for the SPI, including the possible use of one or more external technical support units provided by partners. Further information on these modalities and procedures, as well as the feasibility study, is contained in documents ICCD/COP(17)/CST/5 and ICCD/COP(17)/CST/INF.2.

66. The SPI continued its cooperation with the Intergovernmental Science–Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services (IPBES), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils, the UNEP International Resource Panel, the Global Land Indicators Initiative of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, and the Integrated Drought Management Programme. The SPI also analysed and synthesized key messages from two scientific assessment reports: (a) The IPBES Thematic Assessment Report on the Interlinkages Among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health;² and (b) The IPBES Thematic Assessment Report on the Underlying Causes of Biodiversity Loss and the Determinants of Transformative Change and Options for Achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity.³

67. STI collaborated over the 2025–2026 biennium with several specialized partners to develop science-based policy and practical guidance, as follows:

- STI and FAO developed guidance to address the degradation of land and soils in agricultural lands, including a digital compendium in the artificial intelligence-enabled Agrifood Systems Technologies and Innovations Outlook Knowledge Base;
- STI and the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security developed guidance for integrating aridity trends and drought planning into adaptation across the UNCCD, UNFCCC, CBD and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 action planning processes;
- STI and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis prepared a feasibility study on carbon farming in Greater Central Asia. STI also coordinated the preparation of the practical “Handbook on Land Degradation Neutrality Assessment in Central Asia: Regional Experience and Practical Approaches”, drawing on contributions from experts and institutions across the region and reflecting relevant national experiences, methodologies and perspectives.

68. In addition to its active support to the SPI work programme, STI represented the secretariat in various scientific meetings and processes, and in networking and cooperation with scientific partners. It provided scientific advice in response to requests received from Parties and other UNCCD stakeholders and supports all units of the secretariat as well as the GM in matters concerning science. In particular, STI ensured the scientific integrity of science-based communication products and guidance documents produced by the secretariat and the GM.

69. National reporting enables Parties, through the CRIC, to assess the implementation of the Convention using credible data and an indicator framework aligned with the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and synchronized with that of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3. Through the assessment, Parties decide on medium to longer-term priorities and thereby ensure a focused and targeted approach to implementing the Convention. STI prepares and coordinates the process of national reporting, including capacity-building among Parties, and analyses the information in the reports for consideration by the CRIC. The STI spearheads efforts to ensure that the UNCCD is the authoritative source of nationally reported information and knowledge on DLDD through, inter alia, the development of the UNCCD Data Dashboard aimed at improving the accessibility and visibility of submitted national reports and information contained therein. The unit also prepares for meetings of the CRIC Bureau and supports it in the organization and handling of CRIC sessions. It further facilitates exchanges with the CST Bureau on issues relating to indicators and methodological work on reporting.

70. The next national reporting cycle started in mid-2025 and will culminate in the review of information submitted by Parties at CRIC 25 in 2027. The fourth generation of the performance review and assessment of implementation system 4 (PRAIS4), where Parties compile and eventually submit their national reports online, was updated for the reporting process following requests made by Parties at CRIC 21. Several upgrades and new features were implemented to continue supporting Parties in using geospatial information, facilitating the mapping and tracking of progress on LDN targets and actions, and providing enhancements to the data management tools and updates to reporting forms. Methodological guidelines were also enhanced and integrated into documentation, namely the addendum to

the Good Practice Guidance on SDG Indicator 15.3.1, which provided additional clarity to Parties on the indicator calculation.

71. After the launch of the reporting process in 2025, the secretariat and the GM provided technical assistance and backstopping for the preparation of national reports in coordination with partner organizations at both global and regional levels through the development of a network of regional support hubs and engaging dedicated technical advisors. Both virtual and in-person support was provided to Parties. Updates to the e-tutorials and pre-recorded videos for interpreting data and filling in the requisite information in the reporting forms were made available, as well as in-person training workshops at regional and subregional levels.

72. In order to realize the vision of an open access ecosystem of tools for use by country Parties when preparing their national reports, the secretariat continued to build data-driven partnerships under the auspices of the Group on Earth Observations Land Degradation Neutrality Flagship initiative. Partnerships with, inter alia, the FAO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), WOCAT and Conservation International also contributed to wide-ranging technical expertise for reporting provided to Parties. Regional and subregional institutions were engaged as regional support hubs to assist Parties in the national reporting process.

73. According to the tentative timeline for the 2026 UNCCD reporting process, the deadline for the national report submission on strategic objective 1 is November 2026, followed by other strategic objective reports in February 2027.

74. Along with the national reporting process, STI, in collaboration with other units, continued to further develop data visualization and data discovery tools for the management, analysis and display of reported data, with the aim of facilitating and improving the use of reporting data for decision-making by Parties and their partners and making it more accessible for policy and advocacy work by the secretariat and the GM.

75. STI coordinates the capacity-building activities and spearheads the innovation agenda of the secretariat, aiming to increase the knowledge, technical skills and expertise of UNCCD stakeholders while facilitating the exchange of practical experiences, leveraging partnerships and providing a space to become engaged in supporting the effective implementation of the Convention, keeping abreast of digital and technological advances. All units of the secretariat and GM are engaged in various aspects of capacity-building and innovation.

76. During the biennium, STI established additional partnerships to support and facilitate capacity-building and the further development of the innovation agenda, including collaboration with 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, the Pacific Community, the Centre international de formation européenne and UNEP, among others. STI also organized information events and lectures in schools and universities.

C. Global Mechanism

77. In 2025–2026, the GM based its approach on maximizing impact with available resources through agility, strategic partnerships and active engagement with country Parties. That meant refining target-setting and planning processes to support intelligent, informed decision-making and project design; mainstreaming engagement with non-traditional stakeholders, including the private sector; and leveraging innovation.

Building on the first phase of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP), LDN TSP 2.0 supported countries in refining and elevating their voluntary LDN targets, making them more specific, time-bound, quantitative, spatially explicit, gender-responsive and integrated into national land-use planning. Through this country-led process, participating countries built direct linkages between the UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD work through stronger coordination and a more proactive engagement of the respective national focal points in LDN working groups. Together with the UNFCCC and CBD secretariats, the GM is developing supplementary guidelines for LDN TSP 2.0 and a briefing note on key lessons learned and identified good practices, which are being refined for publication after COP 17.

78. As the 18 participating countries finalize their respective LDN TSP 2.0 national processes, they are further integrating LDN into their land-use planning frameworks. A central lesson from LDN TSP 2.0 was the need to promote integrated land use planning (ILUP) and integrated landscape management as foundational tools for balancing competing land demands. By embedding LDN principles into spatial and sectoral planning, ILUP enables countries to avoid degradation, scale SLM and prioritize restoration in high-impact landscapes, helping to turn national commitments into coordinated, on-the-ground action. As a critical component of the LDN TSP 2.0 follow-up, the seventh Global Environment Facility replenishment (GEF-7) Enabling Activity project on ILUP, implemented by IUCN and executed by the GM, directly addresses these needs.

79. As at 31 July 2026, 14 of the 18 participating countries have completed refining and validating their revised LDN targets, with the other 4 in the final stages of completion. A total of 26 countries have formalized their expressions of interest to join the programme and have been placed on the LDN TSP 2.0 waiting list, pending the availability of additional resources. A decision on supporting the scaling up of the LDN TSP 2.0 beyond the current 18 participating countries is now critical.

80. In terms of flagship initiatives, the GGW remains the cornerstone in Africa. In the Sahel, the GM supported multi-country efforts to restore degraded landscapes, build resilience and create green jobs in countries including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Senegal. Through the Great Green Wall Observatory, which the Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall developed with the help of the GM, the Great Green Wall Accelerator reports that 389 projects had been registered as of 31 December 2025. Reports from projects show that the GGW initiative has so far resulted in 1.66 million hectares under restoration (of a target of 100 million hectares), 24 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (t CO₂ eq) sequestered or mitigated (of a target of 250 million t CO₂ eq), 2,315 megawatt-hours of power produced, 4.6 million jobs created (of a target of 10 million jobs) and more than 46 million beneficiaries.

81. In Southern Africa, the GM worked with the 16 Southern African Development Community Member States and partners on the GGW to develop regional investment plans, project pipelines and resource mobilization road maps, with a focus on integrated approaches across drylands, including the Zambezi Basin. The Southern Africa GGW Accelerator was initiated to consolidate and deliver the political and resource mobilization ambitions, with a strong emphasis on engaging the private sector.

82. Geographic expansion continued to Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and Eastern Europe, with the GM nurturing multi-country programmes that integrate LDN targets, drought planning and landscape restoration to attract GEF, Green Climate Fund and regional bank financing.

83. Thematic flagships have emerged as a complementary vehicle, cutting across regional groupings to emphasize critical ecosystems and co-benefits. Two new thematic flagships have taken shape in this biennium: (1) a flagship on rangelands, which advances SLM and land restoration models that support pastoral livelihoods, biodiversity and climate resilience, often in combination with nature-positive food systems, and contributes to the IYRP; and (2) The Nature for Food/ food systems flagship and the Rio conventions, developed in cooperation with the CBD and UNFCCC. This flagship highlights regenerative practices that enhance soil health, boost productivity and secure food systems in drylands, positioning these as high-return investment themes.

84. The Peace Forest Initiative (PFI), the first of the UNCCD thematic flagships, was launched in 2019. It provides an inclusive platform for stakeholders to co-design, mobilize resources for and implement joint activities on land restoration, fostering synergy between land, security and resilience. The PFI has worked globally across Central Asia, the South Caucasus, the Horn of Africa and East Africa, South-East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Western Balkans. In this biennium, pilots were launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia, Ireland and Timor-Leste, and Central Asia, in collaboration with UNDP, FAO, the World Bank and others. The UNDP-supported Central Asia pilot was extended to Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. A PFI flagship report titled “Ground

for Peace: Land Restoration for International Peace and Security” and the Peace Forest Initiative Operational Guidelines were also produced.

85. On SDS, the secretariat and the GM developed a global implementation initiative that targets anthropogenic SDS sources and data gaps and engages in advocacy for the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms (2025–2034). In addition, it refocuses global action on issues within the UNCCD’s mandate (i.e. land and source management) through four elements: (a) land-focused monitoring via standardized wind-erosion networks that integrate land health data with remote sensing and dust emission models; (b) source stabilization through evidence-based SLM targeting soil health, vegetation structure and surface roughness in priority hotspots; (c) science–policy integration that refocuses dust models on source areas and aligns SDS with LDN frameworks; and (d) coordination and capacity, including transboundary cooperation and technical capacity-building.

86. At country level, the GM built pipelines of investment-ready projects through targeted capacity-building, project preparation and partnerships aligned with national LDN targets, drought plans and development strategies. Overall, 108 countries have requested support to develop national and/or multi-country projects through the transformative projects and programmes workstream, which is delivered through the PPP. Excluding work carried out under the Great Green Wall Accelerator from November 2024 to May 2026, the results of the GM support to the development of project-related documents (i.e. pre-concept notes, concept notes, project proposals, prefeasibility studies, investment plans and project appraisal reports) through partnerships are as follows: (a) 22 projects approved for implementation (16 national, 5 regional and 1 global); and (b) 29 project concept notes or project documents currently under development which have not yet been approved (13 national, 14 regional, and 2 global).

87. The total budget for the 22 projects approved for implementation between November 2024 and May 2026 is approximately USD 1.48 billion, comprising USD 226 million from the targeted source of funding and USD 1.25 billion from co-financing. In addition, the total expected budget for the 29 project concept notes and/or project documents is USD 770 million, comprising USD 619 million from the targeted source of financing and USD 151 million from co-financing. Therefore, the total amount mobilized if all of the 29 project documents are approved (i.e. 51 projects in total) would be USD 2.248 billion, comprising USD 845 million from targeted sources of funding and USD 1.403 billion from co-financing.

88. The GM has also supported the implementation of pilot projects funded by the Greening Drylands Partnership and the PPP. These pilot projects contributed to transforming LDN theory and concepts into practice and delivering good examples to inform policy, decision-making and implementation at the national level. Since 2012, 18 pilots were completed across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

89. In terms of advancing blended finance, insurance and credits, the GM facilitated the establishment of the DRIF, with a target size of USD 300 to 400 million. DRIF will be the first global fund of its kind dedicated to drought resilience, using concessional capital to de-risk projects and attract commercial finance for equity investments in transferable and scalable drought-resilience technologies and businesses. In addition, the GM is commissioning feasibility studies around parametric and index-based insurance products in Namibia and Pacific SIDS and exploring a land resilience insurance framework that integrates risk reduction, transfer and financing within broader investment programmes, embedding insurance within blended-finance structures and value chains. In partnership with UNEP, the GM is also studying the potential of resilience credits to generate additional revenue streams for land stewards and support more resilient land-use systems in vulnerable dryland contexts.

90. With regard to private sector collaboration, B4L is the principal vehicle for business engagement under the UNCCD: a membership network of businesses committed to responsible land stewardship and aimed at promoting better private sector investment decisions and land-positive, drought-resilient practices. Since COP 16, B4L broadened its membership in agrifood, textiles and infrastructure, supported businesses in testing land-positive approaches, defining land- and drought-related targets and aligning corporate

reporting with national frameworks, and produced sector-specific recommendations for agriculture.

91. In this biennium, B4L focused on three pillars: (1) operations and value chains, supporting businesses in aligning business models with LDN and sustainable land, soil and water management and integrating these into corporate and national reporting frameworks; (2) finance, exploring innovative financial products, most notably the DRIF, and developing an investor scoring system to mainstream land across portfolios; and (3) advocacy to generate national action and policy recommendations.

92. Over 300 private sector entities are registered to the B4L process, including some major global companies. At the 2026 World Economic Forum, the B4L Champions' Council was established, involving twelve high-level corporate leaders³. National B4L hubs are being established in two major economies, to foster private sector engagement in mobilizing investment, fostering innovation and scaling sustainable land management and restoration. To strengthen the business case on land tenure, the GM produced a business case and a tenure checklist offering project developers a practical tool to integrate the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security principles into project design from the outset so that interventions are tenure-sensitive, gender-responsive and do no harm.

93. On drought resilience-building, the GM led the UNCCD support to the development of the RGDRP. This Partnership connects 74 vulnerable countries with technical, financial and institutional support through its three pillars: a Readiness Facility for strategy and pipeline development; an Investment Facility for project financing; and a Knowledge Platform for sharing innovation. This biennium was devoted to establishing the institutional and operational foundations to move the RGDRP toward implementation, which included completing the governance document and holding the first steering committee alongside the CRIC in Panama. The establishment of the RGDRP secretariat, including its TOR and institutional arrangements, was prepared. Foundations were laid to establish the RGDRP Fund as a multi-partner trust fund, and a comprehensive operational manual is under preparation. The RGDRP has now transitioned from design to establishment, with preparatory work under way on the first call for proposals under its Readiness Facility in 2027.

D. Special programmes: Group of 20 Global Land Initiative Coordination Office

94. The Group of 20 (G20) launched its Global Land Initiative (GLI) in November 2020. The G20 GLI aims to prevent, halt and reverse land degradation and reduce degraded land by 50 per cent by 2040. It is implemented through its Initiative Coordination Office (ICO) that is overseen by the UNCCD Executive Secretary and located within the UNCCD secretariat.

95. G20 GLI work is based on four main pillars: (i) showcasing success stories that benefit nature and safeguard people's lives, jobs and incomes; (ii) engaging the private sector in SLM, land restoration and habitat conservation; (iii) empowering civil society and the public in land stewardship for sustainable development; and (iv) sharing knowledge and developing and mobilizing capacity between G20 members, non-Member countries, and other stakeholders to collectively deliver on land conservation and restoration outcomes. While the ICO serves the G20 GLI, its aims and activities are directly responsive to the UNCCD priorities and complement the work done by the secretariat and the GM.

96. During the 2025–2026 biennium, the G20 GLI made major progress in advancing land restoration around the world. Through its ICO, the G20 GLI connected – directly and indirectly – with 155 countries through global partners. It helped build strong political support, opened up public access to geospatial platforms that show land restoration data – including threats to ecosystems, biophysical trends, climate variables and socioeconomic conditions – and inspired both young people and civil society to get involved.

³ B4L Champions Council

97. On advocacy and awareness raising, the ICO cooperated actively with the G20 Presidencies and particularly the G20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group to raise awareness of and commitment to land restoration through technical inputs and co-organizing events. The membership of the G20 GLI expanded, particularly in the Arab region.

98. So far, the ICO, together with the United Nations System Staff College, has organized three sessions of the Global Changemaker Academy for Parliamentarians, training and networking 82 parliamentarians from 49 countries on approaches and tools for advancing national-level land restoration legislation. The next session will take place on the sidelines of COP 17.

99. The ICO Faith4Land campaign mobilized faith actors, who collectively steward 8 per cent of global habitable land and operate nearly half the world's educational institutions. A High-Level Faith Leaders Meeting launched its first stocktake report and strengthened alignment between faith action and national land restoration policies.

100. To advance community-led land restoration at scale, the ICO combined targeted financial support with global recognition to both enable on-the-ground action and celebrate leadership across the sector. The first cohort of 39 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) received grants ranging from USD 5,000 to USD 15,000 to implement land restoration activities. Projects commenced in 2025 and will continue through 2026, strengthening resilience by turning small, community-led actions into lasting environmental and social benefits. The ICO also established an award to recognize the significant contributions of NGOs and the private sector to land restoration.

101. On private sector engagement, the ICO raised awareness about the "restoration economy", which could attract up to USD 1 trillion in financing by 2040. The ICO published a technical paper showing the rise of a global restoration economy, which estimates that this industry could generate USD 1.5–2 trillion in economic value worldwide, along with thousands of restoration jobs. A dedicated side event at CRIC 23 helped advance the ICO plans for a global restoration industry platform, bringing together partners to shape this emerging economic sector.

102. The G20 GLI Youth Ecopreneur Programme registered 1,533 applications from 120 countries. The selected participants completed a 10-week global bootcamp, with top ventures advancing to an accelerator that was supported by the International Trade Centre, Ernst & Young, Google for Startups, the World Intellectual Property Organization and Sidley Austin. In Brazil, the G20 GLI engaged more than 650 entrepreneurs and launched a national training programme. In Kenya, over 150 youth ecopreneurs participated in lectures, field visits and the country's first Land Restoration Enabler Award.

103. On education and capacity-building, the ICO developed two university training courses on agricultural and urban restoration. The agricultural restoration course is currently taught in over 600 institutions and the urban restoration course in almost 200 institutions; in total, they reach well over 1,000 faculty members and close to 25,000 students.

104. The ICO co-organized several training courses on specific topics, such as (i) a landscape restoration planning course in Senegal, including training on geographic information systems (GIS), diagnostics, and cropping systems modelling; and (ii) post-mining restoration training in South Africa, combining lectures, group work, and field visits.

105. On improving access to data, the ICO launched GeoGLI in July 2025, a major geospatial platform that brings together data related to land management from trusted international sources. It provides easy access to more than 160 continuously updated global geospatial layers, including data on land threats, biophysical trends, climate variables and socioeconomic conditions. They can be used to generate standardized national land profiles, helping policymakers plan land restoration with clarity and confidence.

106. In partnership with FAO, the Food and Land Use Coalition and the Alliance of Biodiversity International, among others, the ICO launched the Resilient Agriculture Investment for net-Zero land degradation (RAIZ) mapping tool in November 2025, with the aim of providing essential data to a wide range of stakeholders, including investors, policymakers, NGOs and project developers, across agrifood value chains, helping them to

swiftly and accurately identify areas with the greatest potential for productive restoration. The tool maps degraded cropland and uses grassland and shrubland as proxies to locate degraded pasture, displaying a global heat map of degraded agricultural areas.

E. Administrative Services

107. The Administrative Services programme is tasked with ensuring the effective and efficient delivery of services to the secretariat and the GM with regard to financial management, human resources, procurement and information technology, in accordance with the regulations and rules of the United Nations and the UNCCD.

108. In the 2025–2026 biennium, Administrative Services continued improving administrative processes to meet the evolving needs of the organization. Building on the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors,⁴ expanding the use of the Umoja system was studied with support from the United Nations International Computing Center. Its application to the UNCCD, including related training, will be decided after COP 17. A move to an integrated budget, including the update of the financial rules of the Conference of the Parties, was prepared and presented to COP 17. The update of key internal policies and standard operating procedures continued in close collaboration with the EO and the GM, building on the common United Nations system standards and adjusted to the specific nature of UNCCD operational modalities.

109. The UNCCD measures for cybersecurity were thoroughly updated, including training to all staff. Several potential enhancements to the UNCCD digital environment were explored with support from the G20 GLI ICO, with the aim of improving the organization and use of data and enabling the optimal exchange of and access to information among the units. These enhancements could significantly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of numerous UNCCD functions, but their implementation will depend on the availability of additional resources and will thus be decided after COP 17.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

110. The COP may wish to consider the performance of the secretariat and the GM in the 2025–2026 biennium and use this information to support its consideration of the programme and budget for the coming years.

⁴ <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/2024-07-24%20BoA%20Report%20on%20UNCCD%20FY%202023%20-%20Signed.pdf>.