

ICCD/COP(17)/CRP.1

13 August 2026

English only

Conference of the Parties

Seventeenth session

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 17–28 August 2026

Item 2 (d) of the provisional agenda

2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Review of progress in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat desertification communication plan

Review of progress in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification communication plan

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This report presents actions taken by the secretariat for (i) the implementation of the communication plan; (ii) the yearly global observance of Desertification and Drought Day and other flagship events and campaigns; (iii) traditional and social media outreach; and (iv) mobilizing new and influential voices in support of the Convention.

The report also outlines the communication focus for the next biennium and includes conclusions and recommendations for consideration at the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties.

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I. Background

1. By decisions 4/COP.15, 7/COP.16 and 1/COP.16, Parties requested the secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to enhance effective communication and outreach globally to different stakeholder groups that are active and influential in matters concerning desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), with a view to progressively involving these groups in the implementation of the Convention, and to elevate the profile of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) on the global agenda through strategic communication.
2. Decision 4/COP.15 further called for Parties and invited civil society organizations, the media, the private sector and all other relevant stakeholders to leverage international awareness-raising opportunities, such as the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), for outreach.
3. The same decision also invited Parties to develop communication strategies and to continue to raise public awareness and promote youth engagement on Convention issues.
4. Decision 4/COP.15 also invited UNCCD stakeholders to provide the secretariat with success stories, people-focused stories and photo/video footage from the field, giving a human face to the Convention and hence promoting its understanding, awareness and visibility among the public by adapting communications within local and national contexts.
5. Further, decision 4/COP.15 invited Parties and other UNCCD stakeholders, which are in a position to do so, to make voluntary contributions in support of the implementation of the communication plan.
6. At the meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties (COP) on 24 February 2026, Germany, on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, requested, in accordance with rule 10, paragraph (e), of the rules of procedure of the COP, the inclusion of the review of the progress in the implementation of the UNCCD communication plan as an item on the agenda of the COP at its seventeenth session (COP 17).
7. To facilitate the deliberations on this agenda item, the Secretariat has prepared this note as a conference room paper.
8. The main progress in the implementation of decision 4/COP.15 is reflected in the workplan document ICCD/COP(17)/4, which outlines the work carried out in the implementation of the UNCCD communication plan, highlighting various campaigns and outreach activities, including yearly Desertification and Drought Day observances. It further provides background information on ongoing media outreach and digital engagement, as well as efforts to mobilize new and influential voices in support of the Convention. This document contains additional information on the planned focus of communications activities in the next biennium.

II. Implementation of the communication plan

9. The communication plan supports the mandate of the UNCCD by raising the visibility of land issues on political and public agendas. It provides strategic direction for all aspects of UNCCD's outreach and communications, including public information, media relations, digital engagement, and interaction with key audiences at major events. Underpinned by innovation and effective tools, the communication plan also safeguards the UNCCD brand by upholding quality standards, protecting and enhancing its reputation, and nurturing creativity to reach new audiences with science-based communication and advocacy.
10. All activities under the communication plan are designed to assist UNCCD Parties and stakeholders in implementing the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework) in its entirety and fulfilling their ambitions for the achievement of land degradation neutrality (LDN) and drought resilience. Furthermore, the communication plan is aligned with the UNCCD's results framework for 2025–2028.

11. The secretariat has made consistent efforts to expand its multilingual capacity and public outreach and to make its information materials available in all six United Nations languages, bringing the issues to a global audience and ensuring broad accessibility and engagement.

12. Over the reporting period, the secretariat has made significant progress in increasing awareness about the objectives of the Convention through the development of key messages and narratives, enhanced use of traditional and social media, flagship outreach events and campaigns, and knowledge-sharing products. Central to this period were the annual observances of the Desertification and Drought Day, 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. These are described in greater detail below.

A. Communications campaigns

13. Building on the lessons learned from recent outreach events and the strategic review of the communication plan, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism have designed and implemented several communications and outreach campaigns to increase stakeholder engagement.

14. These were closely linked to the themes selected for annual observances of Desertification and Drought Day and key programmes and initiatives such as the International Drought Resilience Alliance, the Group of 20 Global Land Initiative, United Nations Decades, as well as global observances. In addition, the secretariat continued to actively engage with the United Nations system, including the Rio conventions, on its public outreach initiatives. Detailed information on cooperation with relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies is contained in document ICCD/COP(17)/6.

15. During the reporting period, the secretariat focused on outreach to key audiences, such as policymakers, line ministries in charge of land-based sectors, the private sector, landowners and land managers, the farmer community and pastoralists, women and youth. Particular attention was paid to developing consistent and coherent messaging about the Convention and positioning DLDD issues at the heart of the global development agenda.

16. UNCCD campaigns and annual Desertification and Drought Day observances 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 Sand and Dust Storms (2025–2034), as well as the IYRP 2026. 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.

1. Ambassadors and champions engagement

17. 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 in 2025 and 2026. Following COP 16, the Goodwill Ambassadors collaborated on a joint film project titled “Living Desert”, which premiered at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress 2025.

18. 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 (Côte 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”.

19. Despite the lack of dedicated funding and the conclusion of the Land for Life programme in 2025, 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, and several current and former Land Heroes took part in Desertification and Drought Day global observance events. Additional information on UNCCD’s youth engagement is contained in document ICCD/COP(17)/3.

2. Silk Road Caravan campaign

20. Since it commenced 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 Ambassadors and champions, took part in the journey, culminating in Mongolia at COP 17. The Silk Road Caravan has received formal endorsement from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as the secretariat of 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.

B. World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought

21. Declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1995, the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (also referred to as Desertification and Drought Day) is observed every year on 17 June to promote public awareness of international efforts to combat DLDD.¹ This report covers the Day’s observance activities since COP 16, namely for the years 2025 and 2026.

1. 2025 Desertification and Drought Day 2025 – “Restore the land. Unlock the opportunities”

22. The 2025 Desertification and Drought Day global observance event was hosted by Colombia with 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 Day, while associated media coverage represented a 65 per cent increase over 2024.

2. 2026 Desertification and Drought Day – “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.”

23. The 2026 Desertification and Drought Day was organized in Kenya with the theme “Rangelands. Recognize. Respect. Restore”, with another 70 events taking place worldwide to mark the day. The global observance event, 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

¹ General Assembly resolution 49/115.

Programme 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 and emerging cross-regional rangeland partnerships, thus strengthening Africa-Asia collaboration ahead of COP 17. The total volume of coverage represented a 161 per cent increase compared to 2025, including approx. 3,000 unique articles.

C. Media outreach and digital engagement

24. The UNCCD communication strategy places a strong emphasis on targeted outreach to top-tier global and regional media outlets with the objective of securing comprehensive coverage and an in-depth reporting. Over the reporting period, media coverage has built gradually around key moments, including global observances, leadership engagement, inter-governmental processes and major report releases. The volume of media coverage in 2026 is already approaching the total editorial coverage achieved during the whole of 2025 (ca. 15,000 media articles).

25. A higher share of reporting took the form of original articles, interviews and analysis, contributing to more substantive and contextual coverage focused on explanation and analysis, particularly around drought risks, land degradation and food security. This strengthened the policy relevance and credibility of UNCCD's media presence.

26. UNCCD leadership played a visible role in shaping how land and drought issues were framed in the media. References to leadership appeared mainly in interviews, analysis and opinion pieces that placed land degradation and drought within wider economic, social and geopolitical contexts. This reinforced UNCCD's presence in influential and agenda-setting outlets and strengthened its role as a trusted point of reference.

27. Report launches and data-driven stories played an important role in shaping media coverage. For instance, the "Drought Hotspots Around the World 2023–2025" report generated 761 articles in 26 languages across 80 countries. These moments attracted strong attention from major international platforms and specialist outlets, particularly those focused on policy, science and development. Coverage often continued beyond the initial release through follow-up articles, references and analysis, helping anchor UNCCD's role as a source of evidence and expertise at the intersection of science and policy.

28. Media coverage reflected a broad and well-balanced geographic spread. While English remains the predominant language in UNCCD's media coverage, Spanish-language reporting increased notably, supported by the fact that both Desertification and Drought Day 2025 and the twenty-third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention took place in Latin America. Arabic-language coverage also expanded since 2024, through sustained engagement with the media across the Middle East and North Africa around COP 16. In parallel, science- and data-focused stories featured prominently in Chinese media, while Russian-language media coverage has increased thanks to flagship campaigns, notably the Silk Road Caravan. Together, this mix supported consistent global visibility across the reporting period.

29. Digital engagement continues to drive the Convention's outreach, with website users increasing from 790,000 in 2024 to 2.4 million as at 30 June 2026. However, additional investments are required to ensure the continued performance and cybersecurity of UNCCD's digital infrastructure. The Convention's social media following is also showing dynamic growth, increasing from 172,000 followers in 2024 to 380,000 in 2026 across its main channels. Multimedia products, especially short videos, have seen the highest audience engagement.

III. Focus for 2027–2028

30. Consistent with the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and building on communications work to date, the focus in the next biennium will be on:

(a) Aligning UNCCD Parties and stakeholders around a consistent and inspiring narrative on the importance of healthy land, its contribution to addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, and its central and catalytic role for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

(b) Developing and implementing impactful campaigns that highlight successes by UNCCD Parties and stakeholders in the implementation of the Convention, including at-scale land restoration and drought resilience initiatives; underscore the urgency of addressing DLDD, as well as the environmental, human and economic costs of inaction; and position LDN as a critical yet achievable objective in the context of the SDGs;

(c) Leveraging key opportunities to place land issues high on the global agenda and reach new audiences, with particular focus on leading the annual observance of Desertification and Drought Day and biannual COPs; further increasing the impact of outreach programmes; as well as actively contributing to the implementation of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), the United Nations Water Action Decade (2018–2028) and the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms 2025–2034;

(d) Strengthening partnerships and capacity for raising the visibility of land issues and positioning UNCCD as a go-to authoritative source of information on these issues with the media and other key stakeholders, with special attention paid to providing high-quality, science-based information in relevant formats, channels and languages. To this end, scientific and technical data, information, and policy recommendations from the Science-Policy Interface, the Global Land Outlook and other major scientific assessments will be fully employed;

(e) Mobilizing new and influential voices in support of the Convention's objectives and related advocacy and communications activities, for example the UNCCD Goodwill and Land Ambassadors, Sport4Land Champions and Land Heroes, and leaders from government, business and civil society, with a particular emphasis on engaging Indigenous Peoples, farmers, pastoralists, local communities, youth, women and girls from communities affected by DLDD.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

31. Parties may wish to note this document in the COP 17 report with a request to the secretariat to provide an update on the implementation of the communication plan at future sessions of the COP.