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## Convention to Combat Desertification

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#### Procedural matters

**Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the business engagement strategy**

## Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the business engagement strategy

### Note by the secretariat

#### *Summary*

By its decision 6/COP.13, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to continue engaging the private sector and to work with it to assist the private sector in promoting the implementation of the Convention.

The COP requested the secretariat to report on the implementation of the decision at its fourteenth session (COP 14).

This document contains the reports of the secretariat on the measures undertaken to implement the above-mentioned decision and provides recommendations for consideration at COP 14.

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## **I. Background information**

1. Decisions 5/COP.11, 6/COP.12 and 6/COP.13 set the basis for the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) to promote the involvement of business and industry entities in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The secretariat developed a business engagement strategy (BES) outlining the objectives, modalities and conditions of UNCCD partnerships with business and private entities. The BES was presented for the consideration of the Parties at the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12) and has since governed the relations of UNCCD bodies and institutions with the private sector.
2. At the last sessions of the COP, Parties encouraged the secretariat and the GM to continue engaging with the private sector within the framework established by the BES, and reporting to the COP.

## **II. Implementation of the business engagement strategy**

3. In the last two years, the secretariat and the GM have continued using the BES to engage with the private sector while undertaking the agreed due diligence to ensure transparency when working with business and industry entities.
4. The secretariat has continued its collaboration with the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and other organizations of the United Nations, mainly Multilateral Environmental Agreements, with the aim of sharing information and coordinating the involvement of the private sector. The secretariat has also been working closely with the World Business Council on Sustainable Development to actively engage its members in achieving the land degradation neutrality (LDN) target.

## **III. Concrete involvement of business and industry entities**

5. Since the end of 2015, the secretariat and the GM have engaged in partnerships with several business and industry entities with the aim of strengthening the involvement of the private sector in the implementation of the Convention.
6. The following concrete partnerships and programmes have been undertaken with the private sector following the guidelines set out in the BES, including the due diligence for the engagement of the private sector.

### **A. Land Degradation Neutrality Fund**

7. Following decision 3/COP.12, which requested that the GM develop options to increase resources for the full realization of LDN initiatives, including the “creation of an independent LDN Fund”, the GM spearheaded the development of the LDN Fund.
8. With the support of the governments of France, Luxembourg and Norway and the Rockefeller Foundation, and the involvement of an advisory group bringing together representatives from public financial institutions, international non-governmental organizations and academia, the GM undertook the initial design of the Fund and conducted feasibility studies and a market assessment to foster the development and operationalization of the Fund. Through a competitive process, the private sector investment management firm, Mirova, an affiliate of Natixis Investment Managers dedicated to responsible investing, was chosen to manage the Fund.
9. As an impact investment fund that invests in revenue-generating sustainable land management (SLM) and land restoration projects worldwide, the LDN Fund is catalyzing the private sector’s active involvement, while promoting private sector financing in support of LDN and relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The success of the LDN Fund in mobilizing resources from the private sector has shown the viability of bringing

impact investors, traditionally focused on other sectors such as renewable energy, into the LDN process. It has also shown the importance of using blended finance to catalyze the interest of institutional investors, including pension funds, in supporting LDN initiatives. Since May 2019, the LDN Fund has announced more than USD 100 million in commitments from a wide range of investors and initiated its first investment in January 2019.

## **B. Development of value chains**

10. Following decision 6/COP.13, the GM has stepped up its engagement with the private sector with a view to creating land-based green jobs and strengthening the resilience of rural communities across the Great Green Wall.

11. In this regard, the GM has successfully piloted a demand-based and business-driven approach in Ghana and Burkina Faso for the development of value chains for the region's under-utilized natural products with economic and livelihood potential, including baobab, moringa and fonio. This has included the establishment of local cooperatives, with an underwritten agreement by an international buyer – Aduna, selected under the EU-supported Fleuve project – to ensure the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

12. The impact has been transformational with 24 communities already engaged and more than 11,000 beneficiaries. In order to expand the reach of this model, a capacity-building initiative has been initiated to share knowledge regionally, including with Senegal, Chad, Mali and Niger. It is anticipated that this “proof of concept” project will now be upscaled and replicated to achieve greater scale and impact across the region.

## **C. Sustainable Land Management Business Forum**

13. The government of China and Elion Group organized the fourth SLM Business Forum on the sidelines of COP 13. More than 100 business representatives adopted a declaration<sup>1</sup> that was integrated in the final report of the COP. The private sector members committed to aligning their priorities to include an LDN objective in related research, extension, production, technology transfer, and capacity development programmes and strategies. They also committed to developing innovative eco-technologies and promoting their application in efforts for large-scale desertification and land degradation control and for improvements to land productivity and ecosystem protection and restoration.

14. The fifth session of the SLM Business Forum will be held back-to-back with COP 14 with the support of the government of India and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). The session will focus on boosting sustainable value chains for land-based businesses.

## **D. Soil Leadership Academy**

15. The Soil Leadership Academy (SLA) is a special initiative and an innovative public-private partnership. It aims to energize and support public and private decision-makers on their journey to LDN. LDN is Target 15.3 of the global SDGs. In collaboration with WBCSD, notably Syngenta, the SLA brings capacity-building resources together and acts as a platform for decision-makers to access the training resources they need. Since its launch in January 2014, the SLA has been working on equipping these decision-makers with the tools to effectively pursue and implement LDN at national level.

16. The SLA project organized the “Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange Centre” at COP 13. The primary purpose of this event was to provide face-to-face training to country delegates on selected priority topics. The objectives of the capacity-building sessions were to leverage knowledge products from a network of partners; set up dynamic

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<sup>1</sup> <[https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2017-12/ICCD\\_COP%2813%29\\_21-1717909E.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2017-12/ICCD_COP%2813%29_21-1717909E.pdf)>, page 26.

and interactive capacity-building sessions; and link conceptual frameworks with examples provided by countries and stakeholders.

17. To help deliver the decisions made by COP 13, a two-day interactive Capacity Building Training Fair for national focal points (NFPs) and UNCCD stakeholders took place prior to the seventeenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention – on 25 and 26 January 2019. The training was supported by the SLA with the ultimate objective to support policy-makers with capacity-building resources to help realize the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework and achieve LDN. The main objective of the Capacity Building Training Fair was to facilitate an interactive training exercise for NFPs and policy-makers and other UNCCD stakeholders to help to fill capacity gaps identified in a capacity-building survey carried out in 2017 for the SLA. These training sessions covered the four major areas on which the secretariat's work is focused, namely: LDN, drought, sand and dust storms and the issues of gender. Through this exercise, participants were able to hear from experts from around the world on all four subjects and learn from each other by sharing their practical experience from the field. In total, the training sessions were attended by 173 participants, representing 114 country Parties, and civil society organizations.

## **E. United Nations Global Compact Principles for Sustainable Soil Management<sup>2</sup>**

18. The UNGC continues to promote the engagement of its members in order to support the voluntary business Principles for Sustainable Soil Management developed in collaboration with the secretariat.

19. Since launching the principles, the members of the UNGC have not been very active in implementing them. The main reason for this is that many companies have oriented their focus towards the broader SDG agenda and soil-related topics in relation to Target 15.3. The 2018 UNGC progress report<sup>3</sup> contains information on how the companies are adopting the Ten Principles of the UNGC in their strategy and operations, as well as an evaluation of their actions to deliver on the United Nations SDGs.

## **F. International Solar alliance**

20. The UNCCD signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Solar Alliance to highlight the crucial role of affordable, reliable and sustainable energy for sound land management and inclusive economic growth. The purposes of the collaboration were to spearhead transformative projects and programmes linking SLM with solar energy development to help achieve specific social, economic and environmental outcomes; to promote innovative financial mechanisms such as the LDN Fund that bring together private sector investors and firms to support investments in order to address land degradation and promote solar energy to ensure sustainable development; and to work with other partners in bringing together public and private investments and partnerships in order to scale up solar energy development and help address land degradation and desertification.

## **G. Great Green Entrepreneurship**

21. In support of the Great Green Wall, an African-led initiative aiming to restore Africa's degraded landscapes and transform millions of lives in the Sahel, the GM of the UNCCD is setting up a platform to promote entrepreneurship and the creation of "land-based green jobs" through the establishment of sustainable value chains for dryland products with the potential for export to international markets.

<sup>2</sup> <[www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues\\_doc/agriculture\\_and\\_food/soil-principles.pdf](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/agriculture_and_food/soil-principles.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> <<https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/5637>>.

22. The first pilot training programme was organized in April 2019 in Bolgatanga, Ghana, bringing together 33 policy-makers and entrepreneurs from Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Ghana and Senegal. Entrepreneurs from the five countries exchanged ideas, learnt and shared their experience on the establishment of sustainable value chains for dryland products. The workshop also helped raise awareness among policy-makers of the necessary enabling environment to support sustainable supply chains in the drylands. Among the outcomes of the pilot exercise, the participants identified the importance of the partnerships in overcoming challenges and finding solutions; the opportunities available to create jobs in the area of supply chains (i.e. transport, logistics, advising, packaging); and the avenues opened up by new technologies and social media to facilitate enterprise development.

#### **IV. Conclusions and recommendations**

23. **The COP may wish to take note of the initiatives undertaken and request the secretariat and the GM to continue implementing the BES when engaging in partnerships with the private sector; and**

24. **The COP may also wish to request the secretariat to report at COP 15 on the measures taken to facilitate and encourage the participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the UNCCD.**

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