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## Convention to Combat Desertification

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**Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional level**

**Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues**

## **The positive role that measures taken under the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that causes migration**

**Note by the secretariat**

### *Summary*

Decision 28/COP.13 requested the secretariat to: (a) support Parties, upon request, in promoting the positive role that measures taken to implement the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that causes migration; (b) commission a study on the same topic; (c) support regional and international cooperation and initiatives that aim to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that cause migration; and (d) strengthen cross-sectorial cooperation with other United Nations agencies and programmes, regional and international organizations, and stakeholders to share information on the linkages between desertification/land degradation and drought and migration. This document provides a summary of the activities undertaken by the secretariat and outlines recommendations building on the lessons learned.

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## I. Background

1. The Convention's preamble recognizes that: "desertification and drought affect sustainable development through their interrelationships with important social problems such as poverty, poor health and nutrition, lack of food security, and those arising from migration, displacement of persons and demographic dynamics". The Convention was the first intergovernmental environmental agreement to explicitly address migration and displacement issues explicitly in the context of environmental change.

2. Decision 28/COP.13 requests the secretariat to support Parties, upon request, in promoting the positive role that measures taken to implement the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) as one of the drivers that cause migration and enhancing international cooperation that aims to implement these actions. This document provides a summary of the activities undertaken by the secretariat to respond to the various requests formulated by the decision.

3. The Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration was adopted in December 2018. In the Global Compact for migration, countries have once again recognized that DLDD is one of the drivers/structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin. In the adopted text, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was also mentioned among the international instruments upon which the Compact rests. The 152 countries that voted for the Global Compact committed to creating economic, social and environmental conditions in which people can lead peaceful, productive and sustainable lives in their own country and fulfil their personal aspirations, while ensuring that desperation and deteriorating environments do not compel them to seek a livelihood elsewhere through irregular migration. They also committed:

(a) To developing adaptation and resilience strategies to sudden-onset and slow-onset natural disasters, including DLDD, taking into account the potential implications for migration, while recognizing that adaptation in the country of origin is a priority; and

(b) To harmonize and develop approaches and mechanisms at subregional and regional levels to address the vulnerabilities of persons affected by sudden-onset and slow-onset natural disasters by promoting sustainable outcomes that increase resilience and self-reliance.

## II. Progress made in implementing decision 28/COP.13

### A. Support to Parties

4. Several African countries requested the support of the secretariat in developing project concept notes to demonstrate that restoring degraded lands can play a significant role in stabilizing communities and reducing irregular migration, in the framework of the Initiative on Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S). The 3S Initiative is a State-led initiative launched by Morocco and Senegal to bring a "voice for Africa" into the debate over the drivers of migration and instability on the continent.

5. The 3S Initiative aims to transform degraded lands into zones for inclusive employment and income-generating opportunities. It aims at creating two million jobs for vulnerable groups by restoring ten million hectares of degraded lands. Fourteen (14) countries joined the Initiative: Benin, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of the Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Adhesion to the Initiative is open to all African countries recognized by the United Nations that express a formal interest in participating.

6. Countries which requested the support of the secretariat in developing 3S concept notes are: Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Ghana, Mali, Rwanda, the Republic of the Gambia and Zambia. The projects' developed concept notes are:

(a) The Ecovillages Programme in Burkina Faso;

- (b) Land Restoration and Job Creation for Vulnerable Groups in Equatorial Zone Forest Hotspots;
- (c) Land Restoration for Food and Jobs in the Northern Savannah Zones in Ghana;
- (d) Restoring degraded lands to create jobs in Mali’s soybean and moringa mill to produce oil and flour;
- (e) The Gambian Small Green Business Incubator for Youth & Returned Migrants;
- (f) Restoration and sustainable management of small natural forests and shrub land to build resilience to climate change and improve the lives of local communities in Eastern Rwanda; and
- (g) Plant a Million Trees in Zambia.

7. Despite clear national specificities, these projects share a number of common elements. They all include activities that:

- (a) Restore degraded lands, improve productivity, and help avoid further degradation;
- (b) Create land-based jobs that restore/rehabilitate lands for vulnerable groups, namely unemployed rural youth, returning migrants and women living in land degradation hotspots;
- (c) Reduce the land degradation related drivers of migration/youth radicalization and reintegrate migrants (returning and internal) and vulnerable youth into productive and restoration activities;
- (d) Strengthen value chains for local produce (e.g. sustainably-produced forest and farm products) or add value to that produce; and
- (e) Ensure access and tenure to the land that is to be rehabilitated or restored.

## **B. The study**

8. Co-financed by the European Commission and Turkey through the Ankara Initiative, the “Study on the positive role that measures taken to implement the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that cause migration” was commissioned and prepared by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (summary in Annex I. The full report is available on the UNCCD website).

9. The study was structured in two parts. The first part consists of a review of the literature on the complex interrelationship between migration and DLDD. This part of the study explains how existing migration dynamics are modified or exacerbated by environmental degradation or hazards, rather than uniquely caused by them. By highlighting how the outcomes and impacts of DLDD on population movements depend on a combination of exposure to risk and pre-existing vulnerabilities, the study allows for a broader understanding of these complex interrelationships. This part of the study identifies drought and land degradation as environmental factors that can lead to substantial changes in future migratory dynamics. For example, compared to the period 2000–2015, average projections suggest an increase of drought-induced migrants of approximately 22 million in Africa, 12 million in South America and 10 million in Asia in 40 years.

10. The second – and main substantive – part of the study carried out with IOM reviews good practices and lessons learned from a recent call for contributions launched by the secretariat. In doing so, it sheds light on the positive contribution of land rehabilitation/restoration and sustainable land management (SLM) on migration. The call for contributions, launched by the UNCCD, collected examples of good practices from UNCCD Parties, United Nations agencies and other international organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs) and researchers. In order to assure a geographical balance in the scope of good practices analysed, as well as a diversity of approaches, the study relies on a review of good practices drawn from peer-reviewed literature and other published reports.

11. The third part of the study consists of policy recommendations on how best to achieve the implementation of the Convention by enhancing and further developing good practices by scaling them up in different contexts around the world. The study concludes with remaining gaps in research and policy as well as with suggestions on ways forward.

## **C. Regional and international cooperation and initiatives**

12. In terms of support to regional and international cooperation and initiatives, the secretariat has been particularly active on the 3S Initiative in Africa (as mentioned in section A above), for which it was entrusted to act as secretariat. Financial support to the functioning of the Initiative has been granted by Turkey, the European Commission and Italy. The 3S Initiative provides a unique platform to: (a) identify practical pathways to create new green jobs and value chains to reintegrate vulnerable groups into society in rural areas; (b) pilot country-driven projects in sites where land access/tenure has been granted to youth, women, returning migrants and displaced people as a precondition for investment in land restoration and rural infrastructure; and (c) demonstrate African engagement against the drivers of migration linked to land degradation.

13. The secretariat has so far devoted significant efforts to supporting the Initiative in building and maintaining a network of senior officials (Sherpas) advising the Heads of State or Government. This high-level representation allowed members to: (a) better coordinate the inputs from the different sectors involved (environment, jobs, social security etc.); (b) interact with the diplomatic missions involved in multilateral processes and/or major donors; and (c) engage directly with the decision-makers. The countries' high-level engagement can also be appreciated through the statements delivered by the respective Heads of States and Governments at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and Ministers attending the 3S events.

14. The secretariat has also assisted the Initiative in developing the framework and strategic documents supporting governance, the guidelines for developing 3S projects, country roadmaps and an implementation plan.

## **D. Cross-sectorial cooperation**

### **1. With the International Organization for Migration**

15. Since 2014, the secretariat and the IOM have built a structured collaboration on the land-migration nexus through a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The partnership aims at increasing understanding of the challenges and opportunities relating to the interlinkages between human mobility and land degradation, as well as creating political momentum to bring these questions into global policy agendas. The IOM-UNCCD strategy for action focuses on three key areas of collaboration: (a) climate change adaptation; (b) land rights and security; and (c) sustainable development.

16. Over the last two years, IOM and UNCCD have made important progress towards achieving the goals established for the partnership. While the issue of migration driven by land degradation has been progressively recognized by the international community, UNCCD and IOM have renewed their commitment in delivering joint messages on the importance of addressing the environmental root causes of migration. These efforts contributed to the recognition in the Global Compact for Migration of DLDD among the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin. The EU-Africa dialogue on migration also called for increasing investment to address the root causes of migration linked to climate change and land degradation in the regional dialogues on migration, namely the Report Analysis of the Rabat Process (October 2018) and the conclusions of the Joint Valletta Action Plan (Addis Ababa, November 2018).

17. IOM is also engaged in the implementation of the 3S Initiative. The IOM office in Niger is implementing the first demonstration project in Agadez where 200 ha of land have been restored to create green jobs for unemployed youth, former smugglers and returned migrants. Five hundred migrants have been trained in SLM during their period in the IOM

transit centre while waiting to return to their countries of origin. Lessons learned from this project are referenced in the study.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. With the International Labour Organization**

18. Considering the increasing importance of generating land-based green jobs to address migration driven by DLDD, the secretariat and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have prepared a MOU regarding the promotion of integrated approaches to address environmental challenges, decent work and labour migration. In the MOU, the secretariat and ILO commit to collaborate in mutually agreed areas, including policy, advocacy, communications, project development and resource mobilization to support integrated approaches to advance sustainability, contributing to halting desertification, and supporting decent work opportunities, with a focus on the linkages with migration trends.

19. ILO also provided technical inputs for the study on migration requested by the Conference of the Parties during its thirteenth session (COP 13) and contributed to publications that include aspects of decent work opportunities to address the land degradation related drivers of migration and instability.

## **3. Union for Mediterranean**

20. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has shown particular interest in the implementation of decision 28/COP13. While exploring the potential for replicating an initiative on land restoration addressing rural-urban migration, UfM hired a consultant to select case studies from the Mediterranean region to contribute to the IOM study on the positive role that measures taken to implement the Convention can play to address DLDD as one of the drivers that cause migration, so as to promote the objectives of the Convention.

## **4. Climate-Security Mechanism**

21. As secretariat of the 3S Initiative, UNCCD has been invited to contribute to the Climate Security Mechanism, a pilot coordination mechanism for climate and security housed within the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), with staff input from the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme. This interagency body has the task of providing climate risk assessments to the Security Council and other United Nations bodies synthesizing input from different United Nations agencies and external experts. UNCCD has contributed to their work by describing the effects of DLDD on migration and instability in fragile areas and providing inputs on the 3S Initiative. The drought toolbox, the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS) and land degradation neutrality target setting reports have also been presented as potential sources for collecting data for the climate-security risk assessment framework.

## **5. Multilateral banks and development funds**

22. The African Development Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the European Investment Bank have replied to the request of the co-chairs of the 3S Initiative to appoint a focal point who can advise on technical and financial support for the implementation of the Initiative. The secretariat and the three financial institutions are collaborating in the framework of the 3S Steering Committee as well as at country level to identify joint actions to create jobs for unemployed rural youth, and potential and returning migrants.

# **III. Conclusions and recommendations**

**23. Several lessons can be learned from the work done since COP 13. Measures taken under the Convention can play a positive role in addressing DLDD as one of the drivers that cause migration. As demonstrated by the 3S Initiative, countries that witness how environmental change and population movement are linked are willing to accelerate the**

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of the IOM study is presented in the Annex to this document.

implementation of the Convention. The evidence suggests, however, that a business as usual approach to rural development and management of the natural resource base will not work. Indeed, it will become less effective with rapid demographic growth. A bold new approach to the restoration of land along with the promotion of sustainable agriculture and its associated value chains combined with access to renewable energy offer promising avenues for action.

24. Given that most people who migrate do so in search of better employment opportunities, designing very labour-intensive programmes for sustainable land management and ecosystem restoration has significant potential. For this to be effective and sustainable in the long term, priority should be given to actions that create job opportunities through land restoration but which also strengthen land access and tenure.

25. Insecure land rights and tenure create further degradation, considerably diminishing the possibilities for rural development and increasing instability in rural areas. Policy interventions to address distressed migration from rural areas affected by DLDD would be most impactful if they also strengthened land tenure arrangements and facilitated access to land for vulnerable groups including women, rural youth, refugees and internally displaced persons in rural and fragile areas.

26. Despite growing urbanization in agrarian-based economies, demographic projections also indicate significant growth of the labour force overall and many additional rural labour market entrants in future decades. In this context, rural-based activities will certainly need to generate higher numbers of jobs in absolute terms to help ensure that no one is left behind. However, it would be important to consider not only absolute quantity but also the quality of employment. That is essentially whether jobs can generate incomes beyond subsistence levels. Viable on-farm and off-farm employment opportunities need to be productive, decent and in line with aspirations. Renewable energy is a useful vehicle and option in that context as it is required to unlock the potential of remote rural areas. Rural renewables also offer the prospect for off-farm employment creation, directly and indirectly. The potential for the rapid deployment of mini-grids and other community-level renewable solutions would generate electricity not only for households but for local industries, such as for agricultural transformation.

27. There is a widespread consensus that the bleak narrative that currently prevails on the potential and perspectives for young people in rural areas leads more commonly to denial and despair than it does to resolute action. Desperation and the perceived lack of opportunities, which pushes young people to leave their communities of origin, exacerbate the problem of DLDD as the best and the brightest abandon rural areas. Based on the evidence provided in the study and the lessons learned from the 3S Initiative, other initiatives and good practices, affected and donor Parties should comprehensively address land degradation and the lack of land-based rural development opportunities as drivers of migration.

28. For measures taken under the Convention to play a positive role in addressing DLDD as one of the drivers that causes migration, a new narrative of jobs and future opportunity can be crafted that builds on the hopes and dreams of young people and women in rural areas. One day, young people will inherit and govern their communities. The restoration of the economic, social and environmental capital within the context of the Convention can create a positive new dynamic narrative allowing communities to stabilize and flourish.

29. To do this, Parties and other stakeholders may wish to consider:

(a) Promoting the restoration of degraded land as one way of changing the narrative in communities impacted by DLDD and of allowing UNCCD implementation to focus on new opportunities and solutions which offer hope to young people;

(b) Reviewing development policies, including land-use policies and agricultural practices, with a view to promoting large-scale ecological restoration;

(c) Evaluating how to integrate and build synergy with work on access to renewable energy such as solar and wind energy, both in-grid and off-grid, to catalyse restoration of land and the development of rural enterprise;

(d) Promoting the development of small and medium enterprises in rural areas by creating value chains for local products, reducing pre- and post-harvest losses of agriculture and investing in clean rural industries;

(e) Encouraging private sector investment and exploring how to develop a business case, with public funding to de-risk some investments;

(f) Joining and supporting the 3S Initiative in Africa as well as replicating its model in other regions in order to contribute to employment creation for vulnerable groups in rural areas by the restoration of degraded lands and facilitating access and tenure; and

(g) Organizing a conference on desertification and migration to follow up on the recommendations of the Conferences of Almeria II in order to move from policies to action.

## Annex

### **Summary of the International Organization for Migration study on the positive role that measures taken to implement the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that cause migration**

1. The aim of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is to improve the living conditions of people living in drylands by maintaining and restoring land and soil productivity and mitigating and adapting to the effects of drought. As part of the strategic objectives for the period 2018–2030, the Parties to the UNCCD aim to improve these living conditions with the purpose of substantially reducing migration forced by desertification and land degradation. It is in this context that this study on “the role that measures taken to implement the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that cause migration” has been commissioned to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in partnership with the Stockholm Environment Institute. The first part of the report provides a review of the evidence on the complex and mutual interrelationships that exist between migration and desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD). The review of the evidence shows the complexities that underpin population movements in the context of DLDD by highlighting that its particular impacts and outcomes depend not only on geographical exposure to risk, but crucially on pre-existing vulnerabilities. Even within local populations impacted by the same environmental threats, their vulnerability and likelihood to migrate is affected by their socio-economic status (with those having more initial resources being able to adapt locally and/or through migration), their demographic characteristics (age, gender, etc.), as well as by the migration, environmental and resource management policies in place. Although migration has always been a vital adaptation strategy to cope with DDL, distress movements can contribute to further socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities. In this context, it is important not only to avoid distress migration through interventions that address its root causes, but also to enhance its adaptive potential for combatting DDL.

2. The second part of the study compiles evidence from around the world on good practices and lessons learned both to combat DDL as a driver of distress migration and to enhance its adaptive potential. In order to do so, it draws on a call for contributions launched by UNCCD and on a review of published evidence. Land rehabilitation can significantly reduce distress migration; and adaptive and dignified migration can also contribute towards land rehabilitation. A review of best practices shows that although the sustainable land management (SLM) and Land Rehabilitation strategies that can help tackle distress migration are extremely varied across locations, those that are the most successful share the following characteristics: (a) they protect and restore fragile ecosystems through participatory approaches; (b) they create abundant and dignified livelihood and employment opportunities; and (c) they tackle pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. Interventions that are best able to achieve these aims concomitantly are those which strive to secure land rights and access to natural resources for those most vulnerable, those that are gender sensitive and that empower the most marginalized, those that support local knowledge, and those that help reinforce local institutional capacities. Examples show that the adaptive potential of migration in the context of DDL is enhanced when: (a) migration is done in a safe, orderly and regular manner; (b) destination areas are prepared to receive additional population inflows with dignified employment opportunities for migrants and with adequate social protection and integration measures; (c) migrants are supported to adopt SLM at their destination; and (d) connection between migrants and the left-behind are reinforced and maintained through socio-economic remittances and investment in areas of origin.

3. The third part of the report focuses on policy recommendations as to how best to implement the UNCCD in order to avert, address and minimize the adverse consequences of DLDD on migration and vice versa. At the international and intergovernmental level, enhanced cooperation between the key international intergovernmental organizations dealing with environmental protection, agriculture, migration and labour will be key. In this respect, the study recommends further and enhanced collaboration between UNCCD, the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and IOM, especially with regard to a collaborative implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, UNCCD, and the Paris Agreement. Given the urgency of the need to strengthen land rights and access to natural resources for vulnerable groups including women, rural youth, refugees and internally displaced persons, the study recommends a collaboration between UNCCD and Food and Agriculture Organization in order to support the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure which are key in this respect. Moreover, and in order to ensure that gender and social equality considerations are front and centre in reducing the vulnerabilities that turn hazards into disasters, collaboration between UNCCD with the International Labour Organization and UN Women should be supported. At the regional level, and given that the majority of migration in the context of DLDD will be either internal or interregional, UNCCD should support interregional initiatives and support bilateral cooperation between countries by scaling-up key existing state-led initiatives such as the 3S Initiative which aims to create employment by restoring degraded lands and facilitating land access and tenure in other countries and regions as well as to link up with other regional initiatives such as the Rabat Process, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. Moreover, and given that pastoralism is such an important part of livelihoods in drylands, measures such as the International Transhumance Certificate initiated by ECOWAS could be extended to other regions such as the Horn of Africa. At the national level, it is absolutely essential that the Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, and Labour work in a collaborative and cross-cutting manner when implementing policies that affect any of these three sectors and to avoid any potential trade-offs between them. In this respect, environmental and agriculture policies need to be deeply aligned with the creation of dignified employment opportunities and vice versa. Moreover, and in order to harness the adaptive capacity of migration in the context of DLDD, labour migration policies need to empower migrants so that they can maximize their human, social, and economic capabilities as well as ensuring that origin communities are safe places for migrants to invest in. In terms of research and evidence, there is a need to strengthen the collection and dissemination of knowledge on the links between DLDD and migration by encouraging longitudinal and comparative research, by promoting and facilitating multi-stakeholder co-production of knowledge approaches, by involving local research in all phases of research and implementation, and by promoting further knowledge-sharing on best practices.

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