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

**Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies**

## Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies

### Note by the secretariat

#### *Summary*

Decision 9/COP.13 calls for a review and assessment of the progress made by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in promoting and strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies. This document provides a summary of a select number of such activities and highlights their efficacy in promoting and strengthening these relationships as well as enhancing the implementation of the Convention. Detailed reporting on other partnerships to be addressed by the Conference of the Parties can be found in the relevant official documents. Following the review and assessment, the document proposes some recommendations for promoting and strengthening existing and new relationships.

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## I. Background

1. Decision 9/COP.13 calls for a review and assessment of the progress made by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in promoting and strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies. This document provides a summary of a select number of such activities and highlights their efficacy in promoting and strengthening these relationships as well as enhancing the implementation of the Convention. Detailed reporting on other partnerships to be addressed by the Conference of the Parties (COP) can be found in the relevant official documents.

2. Making significant progress towards the strategic objectives of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires strong and effective relationships that can leverage the appropriate synergies with organizations that have overlapping or convergent missions. This includes not only the Rio Conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements but also those organizations and institutions focused on issues directly relating to sustainable land management, including monitoring and reporting, capacity-building, gender equality, drought, sand and dust storms, science-policy interface, governance and land rights, rural development, migration and conflict, knowledge and technology transfers, media outreach and communications, and resource mobilization.

## II. Monitoring and reporting

3. The UNCCD secretariat, as the custodian agency for SDG indicator 15.3.1. (“proportion of land that is degraded over total land area”), continues to play an active role in the ongoing Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) that oversees the SDG indicator framework adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission. In November 2017, the IAEG-SDGs raised SDG indicator 15.3.1 to Tier II status based on the revised metadata document,<sup>1</sup> submitted by the secretariat, recognizing that the indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but that data are not regularly produced by countries.

4. This advancement was the result of a collaboration to produce Good Practice Guidance for SDG Indicator 15.3.1,<sup>2</sup> which began with the creation of an inter-agency advisory group composed of the UNCCD, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). With several additional partners, this collaboration now takes the form of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Initiative described below.

5. The Global Mechanism (GM) and the secretariat executed the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded Global Support Programmes (GSP) I and II in cooperation with UNEP as the GEF Implementing Agency, and many other partners. Many of these partners, specifically Conservation International, the European Space Agency, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, the International Soil Reference and Information Centre, and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation of Australia, contributed to and helped facilitate the regional capacity-building workshops for UNCCD reporting held from March to May 2018. This also involved host country governments who supported, in cash and in kind, the convening of these workshops. Further information can be found in document ICCD/CRIC(18)/6.

6. The secretariat used the information submitted to it by Parties in their 2018 national reports relevant to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically the data relating to SDG indicator 15.3.1, to report regionally and globally,

<sup>1</sup> <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-15-03-01.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> <[https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2017-10/Good%20Practice%20Guidance\\_SDG%20Indicator%2015.3.1\\_Version%201.0.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2017-10/Good%20Practice%20Guidance_SDG%20Indicator%2015.3.1_Version%201.0.pdf)>.

according to the protocols established within the SDG indicator framework, to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held in July 2019.<sup>3</sup>

7. In response to the invitation to the GEO to support the efforts of Parties contained in decision 9/COP13, a GEO Community Activity on the use of Earth observation to monitor LDN was established in October 2017. In November 2018, the terms of reference and implementation plan for a GEO LDN Initiative<sup>4</sup> was formally approved within the GEO Work Programme. The GEO LDN Initiative aims to (a) enhance national capacities to access and utilize global, regional and national data, (b) develop minimum quality standards for the land-based progress indicators, and (c) increase the policy relevance of Earth observation data, tools and interfaces for the next UNCCD and SDG reporting cycle.

### III. Gender mainstreaming

8. An open online course on gender and environment was developed and launched, and is now available online.<sup>5</sup> This effort was led by the GEF and the United Nations Development Programme Small Grants Programme in collaboration with the GEF Gender Partnership, involving the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), UN Women, the UNDP, UNEP and the secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements including the UNCCD, CBD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions (BRS). The course is intended to provide users with the knowledge and tools to mainstream gender in environmental policy and to be effective changemakers for sustainable development. Module four entitled “Gender and Land Degradation” shows how land degradation is closely linked to a variety of social factors, recognizing the importance of taking gender into account in order to address this challenge effectively.

9. The UNDP continues to play a key role in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in the implementation of the Convention. Together with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the UNCCD, UNDP contributed substantively to the development of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan adopted in decision 30/COP.13. During this biennium, UNDP also supported the UNCCD Drought Initiative with technical advice through the gender help desk. In addition, the UNEP GC-RED, with financial support from UN Women, supported Iran and Morocco in piloting the development of a gender-responsive national drought plan.

10. Since the adoption of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan, the secretariat has collaborated with UN Women to strengthen its capacity to enhance gender mainstreaming in its work, including in-situ technical advice and policy guidance on integrating gender issues into UNCCD implementation. With the financial support of the IUCN, three technical workshops on Gender Mainstreaming in LDN Programming were organized in St. Lucia, the Philippines and Zambia to build capacity in designing subregional LDN transformative projects and programmes. During the capacity-building training fair in the margins of the seventeenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 17), a training session was conducted to strengthen the gender expertise of UNCCD stakeholders with the assistance of sponsored gender experts.

11. The secretariat and the GM worked closely with the Global Gender Team of the IUCN to establish a gender help desk tasked with reviewing LDN national transformative project proposals and the national drought plans in order to assess their gender responsiveness. Gender-related advisory services, including significant support to the development of the Toolkit for Gender-responsive LDN Projects, were also provided.

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<sup>3</sup> <[https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2017-10/Good%20Practice%20Guidance\\_SDG%20Indicator%202015.3.1\\_Version%201.0.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2017-10/Good%20Practice%20Guidance_SDG%20Indicator%202015.3.1_Version%201.0.pdf)>.

<sup>4</sup> <<https://www.earthobservations.org/activity.php?id=149>>.

<sup>5</sup> <<https://www.uncclearn.org/open-online-course-gender-and-environment>>.

## IV. Existing and new partnerships

12. By decision 9/COP.13, the secretariat and the GM were also requested to bring to the attention of the COP established partnerships and any new partnerships that may be necessary to further enhance the implementation of the Convention and the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework. Outlined below by thematic area are some of the most pertinent.

### A. Drought and water scarcity

13. The secretariat is a permanent member of the United Nations Water (UN-Water) inter-agency mechanism and participates in the biannual UN-Water meetings. It contributes to the monitoring of progress on SDG 6 “Clean water and sanitation”, the organization of World Water Days, the High-level Panel on Water and the annual UN-Water publication entitled “The United Nations World Water Development Report”. The secretariat is also a member of the “Water Scarcity” and the “Water and Climate Change” expert groups.

14. The secretariat actively collaborates with Bonn-based national and international organizations working on drought, water scarcity and related issues, such as UNISDR, the German Development Institute/Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, the United Nations University, the United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (UN-SPIDER) and the University of Bonn by co-organizing joint events, webinars, publications and awareness-raising activities to support appropriate drought policies and tools at the national level.

### B. Drought Initiative

15. In the framework of the UNCCD Drought Initiative, FAO, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), UNEP, the Global Water Partnership (GWP) and the US National Drought Mitigation Center established a working group to facilitate implementation of the Drought Initiative. The working group has collaborated on the development of a drought toolbox, which is expected to be launched in September 2019, and organized a training session on drought on the margins of CRIC 17 as well as a validation workshop for the drought toolbox in Antalya, Turkey in May 2019. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), UNDP and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) are also partners in the implementation of the Drought Initiative. UfM funded the development of national drought plans in Jordan and Mauritania, while UNDP funded those in Iran, Somalia and Morocco.

16. The secretariat has collaborated with FAO, in the framework of the Global Framework for Water Scarcity in Agriculture (WASAG), where it leads a working group on “drought preparedness” with other members including the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), FAO, GWP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and the US National Drought Mitigation Center. The secretariat is a permanent steering committee member of the GWP/WMO-led Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP). In the framework of this programme, the GWP provided technical support to countries participating in the Drought Initiative with additional capacity building and the provision of case studies, guidance documents and tailored analysis for the development of national drought plans. Further information can be found in document ICCD/COP(14)/16.

### C. Sand and dust storms

17. The secretariat is a member of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms which was formed at the 24th Meeting of the Environment Management Group Senior Officials in response to United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/225. The secretariat has collaborated with other United Nations entities, including UNEP, WMO, scientific institutions and governments on sand and dust storms issues, particularly in the development of science-based communications, a Global Sand and Dust Storms Source Base-map, and the capacity-building training fair on the margins of CRIC 17. The secretariat

has also collaborated with other technical partners and regional entities, such as the Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought Northeast Asia Network (DLDD-NEAN). Further information can be found in document ICCD/COP(14)/17.

#### **D. Changwon Initiative**

18. The secretariat continued its various collaborations in the implementation of the Changwon Initiative launched at the tenth session of the COP (COP 10). Its central vision is to contribute to LDN with support structured around three components: (a) enhancing the scientific process of the UNCCD; (b) mobilizing additional resources and facilitating partnership arrangements; and (c) supporting global frameworks for the promotion of best practices, including the Land for Life Award. The Changwon Initiative continues to provide technical, financial and political support annually for the work of the secretariat in the implementation of the Convention. During the 2018–2019 biennium, activities included LDN target setting and implementation, the Global Land Outlook and derivative regional thematic reports, science-policy interlinkages, sand and dust storms, the Greening Drylands Partnership, capacity-building and a southern African subregional drought initiative, among others.

#### **E. Ankara Initiative**

19. The Ankara Initiative was launched at COP 12 to strengthen the implementation of the Convention. It aims to support the global sustainable development agenda and to leverage the lessons learned from Turkey's experience in and approaches to land management. The objectives of the Ankara Initiative are: (a) to address the key socio-economic factors affecting implementation and to put people at the centre of decision-making, (b) to make institutional arrangements more efficient, (c) to strengthen policy-making by supporting integrated land-use planning in countries vulnerable to drought, and (d) to create lands of opportunity along Africa's Great Green Wall. The Ankara Initiative has supported the activities of the 3S task force, the secretariat's work programme on capacity-building with a specific focus on building an enabling environment for policy-making, the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) at different levels, gender mainstreaming activities, the development of comprehensive drought preparedness systems and drought early warning systems, and other activities in the framework of the LDN Target Setting Programme.

#### **F. Africa and the Great Green Wall**

20. The secretariat has signed a cooperation agreement with the Permanent Inter-Sates Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) to collaborate on a Global Land Outlook (GLO) West African thematic report, the second edition of the GLO, and on the production of land-based progress indicators for the monitoring of LDN implementation in the subregion. In addition, the secretariat has begun discussions with the African Union Commission and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) on the formalization of existing and future cooperation to support the implementation of the Convention by African Parties. Areas of collaboration include: (a) the monitoring and implementation of the Great Green Wall for Sahara and Sahel initiative; (b) negotiation skills training for the African Group; (c) advocacy and awareness-raising activities in relation to the World Day to Combat Desertification, the African Environment Day and the African Drylands Weeks; (d) support for the effective participation of the Regional Economic Communities in the UNCCD process; and (e) support to the regional coordination activities of the African Group, in particular preparatory meetings for the COP and other subsidiary bodies.

21. The GM has supported the Great Green Wall Initiative for the Sahara and the Sahel through the implementation of the FLEUVE project funded by the European Commission, and in partnership with the African Union Commission, FAO, IUCN, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), and CARI. This included collaboration with Aduna, a social enterprise, in the development of sustainable value chains in the Sahel. In the

production of a documentary on the Great Green Wall, produced by the Oscar-nominated film maker Fernando Meirelles, the GM has partnered with organizations such as the GEF and the World Bank, through its Connect4Climate partnership as well as Irish Aid, SOS Sahel, TreeAid and Make Productions. The GM is also partnering with the Irish Government to produce a State of the Great Green Wall report to be launched in 2019 and with the Turkish and Italian Governments in the piloting of projects along the Great Green Wall.

22. The GM has also partnered with major media actors, including the BBC, the Guardian and the Telegraph, to boost awareness of the initiative and share the story of the Great Green Wall with public audiences. Other public engagement partnerships relating to the Great Green Wall Initiative include social media companies such as Brave Bison, brand companies such as VentureThree, and the non-profit social impact media agency Social Impact Media Awards through its classroom educational programme. The production of the virtual reality film on the Great Green Wall has also led to collaboration with YouTube, La Geode Imax Cinema, and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew for the wider release of the film to the public.

## **G. Migration and green jobs**

23. The secretariat and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have renewed their commitment to delivering joint messages on the importance of addressing the environmental root causes of migration. These efforts have contributed to the recognition, within the Global Compact for Migration, of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) as among the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin. The EU-Africa dialogue has also called for increasing investment to address the root causes of migration linked to climate change and land degradation in regional dialogues on migration, namely the Report Analysis of the Rabat Process (October 2018) and the joint conclusions of the Valletta Action Plan (November 2018).

24. The secretariat commissioned the IOM, with contributions from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), to produce a study on the role that measures taken to implement the Convention can play to address DLDD as one of the drivers that cause migration. The secretariat and IOM are also partnering in the operationalization of the African inter-governmental Initiative on Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S). IOM is implementing the first demonstration project in Agadez, Niger where 200 hectares of land have been restored to create green jobs for unemployed youth, former smugglers and returned migrants. In addition, over 500 west African migrants have been trained in SLM at the Agadez IOM transit centre while waiting to return to their countries of origin. Further information can be found in document ICCD/COP(14)/19.

25. Recognizing the increasing importance of generating land-based green jobs, the secretariat and the ILO have prepared a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the promotion of integrated approaches to address environmental challenges, decent work and labour migration. This includes a commitment to collaborate in mutually agreed areas, including policy, advocacy, communications, project development and resource mobilization to support integrated approaches to advancing sustainability, halting desertification and land degradation, and supporting decent work opportunities, with particular attention to migration trends.

## **H. Peace Forest Initiative**

26. At the first Global Land Degradation Neutrality Forum which took place in July 2018 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, the concept of the Peace Forest Initiative was proposed to demonstrate the value of achieving land degradation neutrality in cross-border, post-conflict situations. The objective of the Peace Forest Initiative is to function as a practical platform to facilitate cooperation and collaboration on LDN implementation in cross-border, post-conflict situations. This platform would explore setting common LDN targets as well as joint project development and implementation through partnership building including governments, CSOs, and local communities. The Peace Forest Initiative has the potential to substantially enhance trust and build confidence through cooperative efforts, such as SLM,

forestry and land rehabilitation while supporting the realization of LDN and other SDG targets which could ultimately contribute to the alleviation of political tension, foster reconciliation, and/or be embedded in permanent peace-building processes.

## **I. Post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration**

27. The secretariat and UNCCD NFPs have participated in the consultations to formulate the post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the auspices of the CBD. With the generous support of the Swiss government, national focal points (NFPs) from the four eligible UNCCD regional implementation annexes received funding to attend the workshop among Rio and biodiversity-related conventions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework that was convened in June 2019 in Bern, Switzerland. With UNEP and FAO as the lead agencies, the secretariats of the Rio conventions have been invited to contribute to the design and implementation of the United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in March 2019. This new partnership will focus on identifying and developing possible activities and programmes, within their respective individual mandates and existing resources.

## **J. Scientific Cooperation**

28. Decision 19/COP.13 requested the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to continue to contribute to and cooperate with other international scientific panels and bodies dealing with desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD) issues. During the SPI work programme for 2018–2019, six coordination activities relating to other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies were undertaken. Further information can be found in document ICCD/COP(14)/CST/4.

29. The secretariat has contributed two submissions as an observer to the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) Koronivia joint work agriculture, placing particular emphasis on (a) Methods and approaches for assessing adaptation, adaptation co-benefits and resilience, and (b) Improved soil carbon, soil health and soil fertility under grassland and cropland as well as integrated systems, including water management), on which workshops will be organized in conjunction with SBI 50 and SBSTA 50.

30. The secretariat and the SPI organized a session at the UNFCCC NAP Expo 2019<sup>6</sup> focused on identifying the challenges faced by UNFCCC stakeholders in pursuing projects and programmes designed to meet climate change adaptation and LDN targets simultaneously. The session revealed that addressing land degradation and the pursuit of climate change adaptation are often pursued independently. The most commonly cited reasons were: (a) lack of awareness about the compatibility of adaptation and LDN approaches; (b) the fear of “double counting”; (c) limited formally-endorsed guidance; and (d) a lack of emphasis on these synergies in existing project preparation facilities.

31. Collaboration between the secretariats of the UNCCD and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) contributed to CMS COP 12 decisions which invited Parties to consider exploring the integration of biodiversity requirements into the land degradation neutrality delivery at appropriate scale, in support of the Action Plan for Migratory Land Birds in the African-Eurasian Region (AEMLAP). The Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology, working with the secretariats of the UNCCD, CMS and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (WHC), as observers to the seventh session of the Intergovernmental

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<sup>6</sup> The NAP Expo is an annual outreach event organized by the Least Developed Countries Expert Group under the UNFCCC, in collaboration with various bodies and organizations, to promote exchange of experiences and foster partnerships between UNFCCC National Focal Points, Green Climate Fund National Designated Authorities and a range of other stakeholders on how to advance UNFCCC National Adaptation Plans.

Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), contributed to the definition of topics in the rolling work programme of IPBES up to 2030, especially on the role of connectivity in ensuring integrity and resilience in socio-ecological systems.

## **K. Media**

32. The UNCCD extended its partnership with Inter-Press Service (IPS), the world's largest network of developing country journalists, to support outreach and information dissemination on secretariat and GM initiatives. IPS has published over 20 news and feature stories from April 2018 to March 2019 that highlight national DLDD initiatives and activities in different parts of the world, including those published for key UNCCD events, including the 2018 and 2019 World Day to Combat Desertification, CRIC 17 and COP 14. With IPS assistance, the UNCCD published and posted 10 feature stories on its activities as of May 2019.

## **V. Conclusions and recommendations**

33. When considering the next steps for promoting and strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies, priority should be given to those relationships that assist countries in the implementation of the Convention. It is widely acknowledged that the implementation of the Convention benefits from strong and effective relationships that can leverage the appropriate synergies with organizations that have overlapping or convergent mandates.

34. It is important to reaffirm the usefulness of the three land-based progress indicators for all Parties, as set out in decision 9/COP.12 for reporting under the Rio conventions and the SDGs, which are coherent with the progress indicators/metrics adopted in decision 22/COP.11, namely: (a) trends in land cover; (b) trends in land productivity or functioning of the land; and (c) trends in carbon stock above and below ground.

35. Recognizing that the Convention is served by a relatively small secretariat, there are significant benefits that can be derived from collaboration with external bodies and experts to assist countries in monitoring and reporting on the three progress indicators/metrics.

36. A newly formed partnership in the form of the GEO LDN Initiative will be critical to the secretariat's efforts to (a) facilitate data access and the development of quality standards, and (b) create interactive analytical tools/platforms and innovative capacity-building mechanisms that will reduce the reporting burden and increase national capacities to utilize Earth observation datasets to achieve LDN and other sustainable development priorities

37. Likewise, other emerging partnerships to address gender equality and women's empowerment, drought and sand and dust storms, migration and employment, and media outreach are essential for enhancing the implementation of the Convention and making progress towards achieving LDN.

38. Accordingly, the COP at its fourteenth session may wish to consider:

(a) Contributing, financially or in-kind, to the GEO LDN Initiative and continuing to work with the GEO LDN Initiative to address gaps relating to the land-based progress indicators and increase the policy relevance of Earth observation data, tools and interfaces for the next UNCCD reporting cycle 2021–2022 and SDG reporting in accordance with the data requirements and protocols established by the IAEG-SDGs and the United Nations Statistical Commission;

(b) Building on existing partnerships to support gender equality mainstreaming at all levels, especially at the national and subnational levels, and requesting the GEF to provide support for joint requests that enhance synergy in

**awareness-raising and capacity-building to increase gender equality at the regional and global levels, which are submitted by the Rio conventions' secretariats at the request of their respective Parties;**

**(c) Strengthening existing partnerships to support activities on sand and dust storms, drought monitoring, preparedness and early warning systems, drought vulnerability assessments and drought risk mitigation measures, and migration and green jobs, especially at the national and subnational levels; and**

**(d) Seeking new partnerships to further enhance the implementation of the Convention and its 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, in the context of emerging issues such as the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, the United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, and the New Urban Agenda.**

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