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### *African Ministerial Conference on the Environment*

#### **African Ministerial Conference on the Environment**

##### **Eighteenth session**

Online, 13, 14 and 16 September 2021

and Dakar, 12–16 September 2022\*

## **Outcomes of the fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification\*\***

### **Note by the secretariat**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire between 9-20 May 2022. The conference, whose theme was 'Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity', witnessed the participation of nearly 7,000 participants including nine Heads of State, environment ministers and other Heads of delegations, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and observer organisations the private sector, civil society, women, youth leaders and media.
2. The Conference of the Parties concluded with a global pledge to boost drought resilience and invest in land restoration for future prosperity.

#### **II. Key outcomes and decisions of the Conference of the Parties**

3. The Conference of the Parties adopted 38 decisions<sup>1</sup>, including on tenure, migration and gender, that highlight the role of land in addressing multiple crises. Decisions also cover drought resilience, reduce land degradation, invest in land restoration efforts. The Conference of the Parties called for accelerating the restoration of one billion hectares of degraded land by 2030, and to boost drought resilience.
4. The Conference of the Parties established the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought whose work will run from 2022-2024. The Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought will investigate possible options, including global policy instruments and regional policy frameworks, to support a shift from reactive to proactive drought management.
5. This convention also came up with the Land, Life and Legacy Declaration, which among others called for women's involvement in land management as important enablers for effective land restoration; the need to address sand and dust storms and other escalating disaster risks; to promote decent land-based jobs for youth and land-based youth entrepreneurship and strengthen youth participation in the UNCCD process; and to ensure greater synergies among the three

\* In accordance with the decision taken at the meeting of the Bureau of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment held on 26 May 2022, the eighteenth session of the Conference, which was adjourned on 16 September 2021, will resume as an in-person meeting in Dakar from 12 to 16 September 2022.

\*\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/press-releases/united-global-call-act-land-degradation-and-drought-concludes-major-un>.

Rio Conventions; and to further integrate Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 15.3, into national strategies, plans and programmes, as appropriate and on a voluntary basis.

6. The implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification communication plan was deemed necessary during the Conference and the Conference invited the Parties to develop communication strategies for target audiences, continue to raise public awareness and promote youth engagement on Convention issues, and to continue to actively support the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification communication plan. The Conference of the Parties further urged and invited the parties to make voluntary contributions in support of the implementation of the communication plan.

7. It was also emphasized that the participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification would be a key aspect of implementing the convention. In this regard, countries with no or few civil society organizations accredited to the Conference of the Parties were urged to promote the involvement of their organizations in the UNCCD at the International level. The secretariat was also encouraged to consider and develop a youth engagement strategy and the modalities for its implementation to ensure stronger, effective and meaningful participation of youth in the meetings and processes of the Convention.

8. Participation and involvement of private sector in the implementation of the Convention and the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification was particularly stressed, and hence the need to engage with companies that are working in the food-feed-fibre sector that have potential to make positive contributions to addressing land degradation and drought and continue engaging the private sector on sustainable land use and value chain development, while promoting decent land-based jobs for the youth.

9. The Conference of the Parties also emphasized on the usefulness of the three land-based progress indicators as set out in decision 9/COP.12, which enhances the promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies. These progress indicators as set out in decision 9/COP.12, are for monitoring and reporting under the Rio conventions and the Sustainable Development Goals, and hence welcomed the thoughts and process to enhance the existing and establish new partnerships in the bid to promote and strengthen relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies.

10. Additionally, Conference invited Parties to join the multi-partner Abidjan Legacy Programme as a model for increasing sustainability and ambitions, while protecting and restoring forests and lands and improving the resilience of communities and ecosystems to climate change. The Conference of the Parties decided to include the Abidjan Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality for Successful Land Restoration as an annex to the final report of the Conference of the Parties on its fifteenth session. Parties were also invited to strive for more effective partnerships, financing, and cooperation at all levels, among the Rio conventions and other relevant mechanisms and processes. Additionally, the Conference of the Parties was urged to support the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and its road map, especially in the areas of policy, advocacy and research.

11. On its Land, Life and Legacy Declaration, the Conference of the Parties acknowledged the new strategy of the eighth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility<sup>2</sup> on land degradation and urged Parties to take a proactive, comprehensive, and holistic approach towards sand and dust storms source mitigation and drought impact mitigation, adaptation and resilience. The Conference of the Parties welcomed the Sand and Dust Storms Compendium: Information and Guidance on Assessing and Addressing the Risks and the Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox<sup>3</sup> and invited Parties to make use of the Compendium and the Toolbox to strengthen their preparedness for sand and dust storms. Parties were urged to continue developing the Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox, including the global Sand and Dust Storms Source Base-map and other geographic information system platforms, data and tools, and support the capacity of country Parties to use them.

12. The Conference of the Parties also welcomed the second edition of the Global Land Outlook<sup>4</sup> which demonstrates that the mismanagement of land resources – soil, water, and biodiversity – represents a threat to humanity and the planet.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thegef.org/who-we-are/funding/gef-8-replenishment>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/sand-and-dust-storms/toolbox>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-04/UNCCD\\_GLO2\\_low-res\\_2.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-04/UNCCD_GLO2_low-res_2.pdf)

13. The Conference of the Parties invited development partners, international financial institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders to boost investments and technological and technical support, move towards more sustainable food systems, and secure and promote tenure rights and access to land for all, and especially the groups in vulnerable situations. It also reaffirmed the contribution of sustainable land management and land restoration to improving the living conditions of affected communities, and as a means of preventing forced migration and displacement.

14. The Conference of the Parties noted the immense role that the Science-Policy Interface plays on the interlinkages between land tenure, land degradation neutrality and integrated land-use planning. Therefore, the Conference invited Parties to explore ways to integrate land tenure information into their capacity development efforts and data analytic tools for evidence-based decision-making to support land degradation neutrality implementation through integrated land-use planning.

15. The Secretariat called upon all parties to recognize that a significant portion of all land is degraded, and hence invited them to pursue a systemic approach to land conservation and restoration as well as to the sustainable land management of all types of degraded ecosystems. Parties were encouraged to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation

16. Parties were invited to identify financing opportunities to strengthen land governance and build a business case for responsible and sustainable public and private investments in land tenure within the context of activities to combat desertification/land. With a view to avoiding duplication of reporting efforts, Parties were invited to continue exploring existing global indicators and data sets relevant to land governance and, when appropriate, engage with relevant partners and institutions to pilot options to integrate potential indicators in future UNCCD reporting processes

17. It was decided that the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties shall be held in Saudi Arabia in 2024, and the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties shall be held in Mongolia in 2026<sup>5</sup>.

### III. Side Events at the fifteenth Conference of the Parties

18. Beside the main conference, the Conference of the Parties had other special events such as Side Events, Gender Caucus, Green Business Forum, Science Day, youth forum and Exhibition. Side events were organized within the side-lines of the official sessions of COP15<sup>6</sup>. They were especially useful because they provided an informal opportunity for Parties and accredited observer organizations to exchange information and experiences on diverse issues related to the objectives of the Convention.

19. The Gender Caucus took place from 9-16 May, and it majorly focused on four priorities for action of the Gender Action Plan, which was adopted by Parties at COP13. These included:

- (a) Women's participation in decisions
- (b) Integrating women's economic empowerment in UNCCD implementation
- (c) Strengthening women's land rights and access to resources
- (d) Enhancing women's access to improved knowledge and technologies that relate to effective UNCCD implementation

20. The Green Business Forum took place between 10th and 11th May. It highlighted the role of private sector in developing and implementing sustainable innovations to protect soils and rehabilitate land. During this event, the Business for Land (B4L) initiative was launched, and the Great Green Wall Sourcing Challenge was presented as part of the B4L initiative. The forum also provided the private sector with a great platform to discuss and highlight their approaches to sustainable land management

21. The Youth Forum was held on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022. It presented the youth with an opportunity to voice their commitments toward achieving land degradation neutrality, build their capacities and opportunities to work toward combating desertification, land degradation and drought, and share their experiences in combating desertification. The forum brought together young farmers, young entrepreneurs and other youth representatives with an aim of enhancing capacity and foster their efforts towards sustainable land use.

<sup>5</sup> [www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-06/cop23add1-advance.pdf](http://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-06/cop23add1-advance.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/cop15/side-events>

22. This forum had three focus areas:
- (a) Land jobs of the future and the sustainable use of land.
  - (b) Green economy and youth employment
  - (c) Meaningful engagement of the youth in advocating for the protection and rehabilitation of the land.

#### **IV. Key messages for the Africa Ministerial Conference on the Environment**

23. *Next COP 16 in Saudi Arabia:* The sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties shall be held in Saudi Arabia in 2024. There is need for adequate preparations by Africa for effective participation in the Conference of the Parties through intersessional regional preparatory meetings. The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment is requested to provide policy directions as the agenda becomes clear. The seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties shall be held in Mongolia in 2026.

24. *The Abidjan Legacy Programme:* The Abidjan Legacy Programme aims to mobilize \$1.5 billion to boost long-term environmental sustainability in key value chains, while protecting and restoring forests and land. It also aims to improve community resilience to climate change in Côte d'Ivoire and sustainably increase the country's agricultural production. The African Development Bank pledged to mobilise an initial USD 500 million to kick-start the programme. Several development partners have pledged to support the programme.

25. *Intergovernmental Working Group on drought:* Take note of the work of the Intergovernmental Working Group on drought as it unfolds. The Conference of Parties at its fifteenth session decided to establish an Intergovernmental Working Group on effective policy and implementation measures for addressing drought under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, with a view to presenting its findings and recommendations to Parties for their consideration at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties. The Intergovernmental Working Group will consist of three-Party representatives nominated by each respective regional group based on nominations by national governments (21 members), plus two representatives from civil society organizations (as observers), two representatives from international organizations working on drought and two independent experts.

26. *Sand and Dust Storms:* Parties were invited to make use of the Sand and Dust Storms Compendium and the Toolbox to strengthen their preparedness for sand and dust storms. Parties were urged to continue developing the Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox, including the global Sand and Dust Storms Source Base-map and other geographic information system platforms, data and tools, and support the capacity of country Parties to use them.

27. *Communicating the Desertification and Drought:* Parties have been invited to develop communication strategies for target audiences, continue to raise public awareness and promote youth engagement on Convention issues, and to continue to actively support the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification communication plan.

28. *Strengthening Civil society in UNCCD:* The fifteenth Conference of the Parties recommended that member states with no or few civil society organizations accredited to the Conference of the Parties should be encouraged to promote the involvement of their organizations in the UNCCD at the International level.

29. *Youth and Women:* Further encourage and strengthen the full participation of youth and women in land restoration initiatives through creating clean land-based employment opportunities<sup>7</sup>. Women play a major role in effective land restoration, hence their access to land rights should be strengthened while also involving them in decisions.

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<sup>7</sup> Okpara, U. T., Stringer, L. C., Akhtar-Schuster, M., Metternicht, G. I., Dallimer, M., & Requier-Desjardins, M. (2018). A social-ecological systems approach is necessary to achieve land degradation neutrality. *Environmental science & policy*, 89, 59-66.