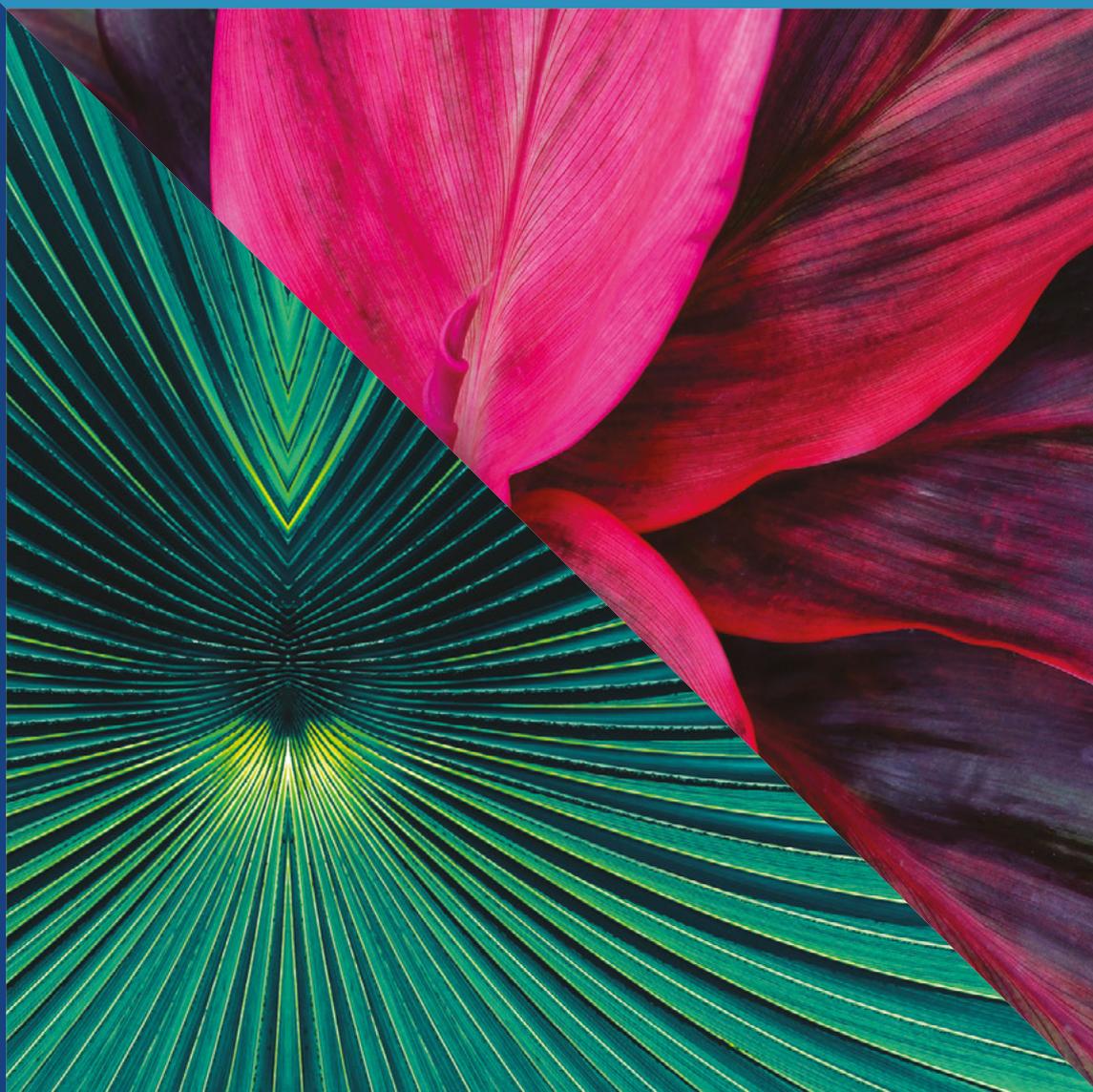


GLOBAL POLICY CENTRE ON RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS AND DESERTIFICATION



Final Report of the GC-RED Programme
for the Period 2015–2022

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ACRONYMS

AI-CD	African Initiative for Combating Desertification
BES-Net	Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network
BPPS	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
CoBRA	Community-Based Resilience Analysis
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRIC	Committee for Review of the Implementation of the Convention
DDD	Desertification and Drought Day
DLDD	Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought
EC/JRC	European Commission's Joint Research Centre
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GC-RED	Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GLO	Global Land Outlook
GM	Global Mechanism of the UNCCD
GPN	Global Policy Network
GWP	Global Water Partnership
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas
IDMP	Integrated Drought Management Programme
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IPBES	Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWG	Intergovernmental Working Group
LDN	Land Degradation Neutrality
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NCE	Nature, Climate and Energy
NDP	National Drought Plan
NRI	Natural Resources Institute of the University of Greenwich
PBL	Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency
PEA	Poverty-Environment Action for the Sustainable Development Goals
RAU	Resilience Analysis Unit
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDS	Sand and Dust Storms
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SRC	Stockholm Resilience Centre
SSP	Shared Socioeconomic Pathway
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNSO	United Nations Sudano Sahelian Office
WFP	World Food Programme
WG	Working Group
WMO	The World Meteorological Organization
WOCAT	World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies
WUR	Wageningen University and Research

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification (GC-RED) has been - through its various incarnations¹ - at the forefront of promoting sustainable development in drylands and other fragile ecosystems. On behalf of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Centre supported the establishment of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and its implementation in over 70 countries since 1994. In 2014, its mandate was expanded to embrace a broader agenda related to sustainable management of natural capital and resilience building. The thematic focus areas of the Centre are:

1. Sustainable management of land, biodiversity and ecosystem services for optimal livelihoods and jobs creation, with a focus on the poorest communities.
2. Building resilience of communities in drylands and other fragile ecosystems to shocks and stresses from climate-related risks and extreme events, particularly drought.

The Centre provides policy and capacity building support, technical assistance, financial resources, advocacy and knowledge management services to UNDP and its partners to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 15 – Life on Land. It contributes to the implementation of UNDP’s Signature Solution on Environment and complements the global project portfolio supported by UNDP through vertical funds.

Based in Nairobi, the Centre supports UNDP’s collaboration with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in the spirit of Delivering as One. It provides technical support to the office of the UNDP Kenya Resident Representative in his/her role as UNDP’s Nairobi-based representative to UNEP and UN-Habitat. It carries out the UNDP Managing Agent function for the Poverty-Environment Action for the Sustainable Development Goals (PEA), a joint global project with UNEP.

The Centre manages the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net) which aims to build capacity and commitment for biodiversity action across the world. BES-Net is designed to support the Rolling Work Programme 2019-2030 of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), including its Capacity Building Rolling Plan.

The Centre’s work is delivered through three interconnected projects, namely: PEA; BES-Net; and the Global Policy Centre Programme (GC-RED Programme) which covers its UNCCD-related activities. This document is the final report of the GC-RED Programme for the period 2015-2022.

1 The Centre originated from the United Nations Sudano Sahelian Office (UNSO). It was established, following a United Nations General Assembly decision in 1973, to address the problems of drought in Sahelian countries. UNSO was transferred to UNDP from the UN Secretariat in 1976. In 1994, UNDP designated UNSO as its central entity to lead on its work in desertification control, drought preparedness and mitigation. UNSO was transformed into the UNDP Office to Combat Desertification and Drought in 1995, and the Administrator created a UNDP Trust Fund to channel extra-budgetary resources for UNSO’s work. In 2001, UNSO became the UNDP Drylands Development Centre (DDC) and moved from New York to Nairobi. In 2014, DDC was reorganized into the UNDP Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification.

1.2 The Programme

The overall objective of the GC-RED Programme was to advance global thinking and knowledge sharing on inclusive and sustainable development in drylands. Its specific objectives were to undertake applied policy research, generate evidence on policies and good practices and provide technical support for the sustainable management of natural capital and resilience building in drylands.

The Programme worked at the policy-practice interface by: a) Undertaking applied policy research and analysis; b) Providing policy and technical advice to UNDP and its global, regional and national partners; c) Providing programme development and implementation support to UNDP country offices; and d) Facilitating knowledge sharing among the communities of science, policy and practice.

The Programme served to channel the Centre’s support to UNCCD, particularly the implementation of the [UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework](#). This framework is “the most comprehensive global commitment to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in order to restore the productivity of vast expanses of degraded land, improve the livelihoods of land-dependent people, and reduce the impacts of drought on vulnerable populations consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

UNCCD was represented on the GC-RED Programme Board, providing strategic guidance and direction for the development and implementation of annual workplans. Policy research and analysis was conducted in partnership with reputable research and academic institutions such as the Natural Resources Institute of the University of Greenwich (NRI), the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL), the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (EC/JRC), the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) and Wageningen University and Research (WUR). Knowledge products were peer reviewed and vetted in-line with UNDP’s Quality Assurance Procedure.

Country-level activities were designed in response to expressed needs and implemented by UNDP country offices. This included, among others, technical assistance for the establishment of Land Degradation Neutrality Targets, development of National Drought Action Plans and undertaking of Community-Based Resilience Assessments. The Centre worked closely with the team leads and members of UNDP’s Global Policy Network (GPN), for example, to prepare UNDP’s position papers for the sessions of the UNCCD’s Conference of the Parties (COP), conduct policy research on “Women’s Empowerment in the Drylands” and support countries on sustainable land management (SLM) and restoration.



2. Main Achievements

This final report presents the main achievements of the Programme and reflects on the good practices and lessons learnt from its implementation. The achievements are analysed with respect to their contribution to the following strategic priorities for drylands development:

1. UNCCD Implementation;
2. Land Degradation Neutrality;
3. Gender Equality;
4. Resilience Building; and
5. Sand and Dust Storms.

2.1 UNCCD Implementation

The Centre has been a strong advocate of UNCCD since its adoption in 1994. With the coming into force of the Convention in 1996, it assisted over 70 countries to develop and implement National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification and supported major capacity building and policy advocacy initiatives to advance the implementation of the Convention.

In 2015-2022, the Centre pursued its support to UNCCD via the GC-RED Programme. It engaged in the activities and processes of the Convention, including all COP sessions. The Centre contributed to the implementation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework through its policy research, advocacy and capacity building, and technical support on: a) LDN; b) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; b) Drought Resilience; and c) Sand and Dust Storms (see Sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5).

2.1.1 COP Sessions

The Centre coordinated UNDP's participation in the sessions of the COP held during this reporting period, namely: COP12, Ankara, 2015; COP13, Ordos, 2017; COP14, New Delhi, 2019; and COP15, Abidjan, 2022. This participation resulted in excellent visibility and positioned UNDP as a valued partner for UNCCD implementation. In a letter to the UNDP Administrator, the UNCCD Executive Secretary indicated that the "significant achievements of the Ordos Conference of the Parties (COP13) were made possible by UNDP's contribution and the support provided through GC-RED". The UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework, and its accompanying Gender Action Plan (GAP), were adopted by COP13 in September 2017. The first edition of the Global Land Outlook was also launched at COP13.

UNDP's delegation to COP14, New Delhi, was led by the Administrator to stress UNDP's commitment to the partnership with UNCCD and support to countries for its implementation. The Administrator was the keynote speaker for the Roundtable on "Land, Climate and Renewable Energy", organized during the High-Level Segment. The roundtable explored how land-based solutions can be strategically deployed to fight climate change. Moreover, the Centre organized side events on advancing the implementation of the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework and contributed to the launch of the UNCCD Gender Caucus and UN Coalition on Combatting Sand and Dust Storms (SDS). "UNDP's significant role in making COP14 a milestone for the land restoration movement" was emphasized by the UNCCD Executive Secretary.

In 2022, the Associate Administrator led UNDP's delegation to COP15 in Abidjan. The Centre supported her participation in the High-level Roundtable, 'Land Restoration: A Path to Sustainable Post-Pandemic Recovery', as well as in the Gender Caucus, convened under the theme 'In Pursuit of Gender Equality for Strong Land Stewardship'. The Associate Administrator highlighted UNDP's views on land restoration and its multiple benefits for sustainable development, as well as its support on gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of desertification, land degradation and drought.

2.1.2 UNDP Position

The Centre led the preparation of UNDP's position papers for the COP sessions, in close collaboration with the Global Environmental Finance Unit of the Nature, Climate and Energy Group (GEF/NEC). These papers articulate UNDP's vision, approach and response to the global challenge of land degradation, and highlight its role in the global partnership to advance the implementation of UNCCD.

In "[Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality for People and Planet](#)", prepared in 2017 for COP13, the authors define UNDP's position on LDN, the guiding principle for UNCCD implementation in 2018-2030. The paper asserts UNDP's commitment to supporting countries on SLM and restoration in the context of SDG Target 15.3 on "combating desertification, restoring degraded land and achieving LDN." It defines UNDP's three-pronged approach to supporting countries on LDN through: capacity development, advocacy and policy advice; support to the adoption of locally-appropriate technologies and approaches; and access to blended finance packages to implement transformative projects to meet national LDN targets.

In 2019, the Centre published UNDP's position paper for COP14 titled "[Combatting Land Degradation - Securing a Sustainable Future](#)". The paper articulates UNDP's response to the global land degradation challenge, presents its service offer on SLM and restoration and highlights its support to the implementation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework. This support is organized around the Strategic Objectives of the Framework, namely: 1) Halting and Reversing Land Degradation; 2) Improving the Living Conditions of Affected Populations; 3) Building Resilience to Drought; 4) Generating Global Environmental Benefits; and 5) Mobilizing Resources for UNCCD Implementation. It highlights UNDP's policy and capacity building support on land degradation, and its contribution to the design of practical interventions in degraded landscapes to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation.

The Centre helped communicate UNDP's position on the occasion of Desertification and Drought Day (DDD). In his [video message](#) on DDD2020, the Administrator stressed that "simple changes in our everyday lives will ensure that we have enough land to meet our growing demand for food, feed and fibre. The choices we make when buying food or clothing have long-term consequences on the sustainability of our land resources". In his [DDD2021 address](#), the Administrator said: "Over the coming decade, we will support countries to integrate their LDN targets into national planning and budgeting frameworks and ensure these are turned into action through implementation. UNDP has committed to supporting at least 30 countries to implement their LDN targets and restore 10 million hectares over the next Decade, and I am confident that we will exceed this target. We are calling this the Ecosystem Restoration Promise".



The details regarding the Centre’s support to UNCCD implementation during the Programme period 2015-2022 are discussed in the following sections.

2.2 Land Degradation Neutrality

LDN is a positive aspirational goal that entails: adopting sustainable land management policies and practices to minimize current, and avoid future, land degradation; and restoring degraded and abandoned lands. The innovative aspect of LDN, that differentiates it from previous efforts to tackle land degradation, is the adoption of neutrality as the goal in order to achieve a situation of zero net loss of healthy and productive land.

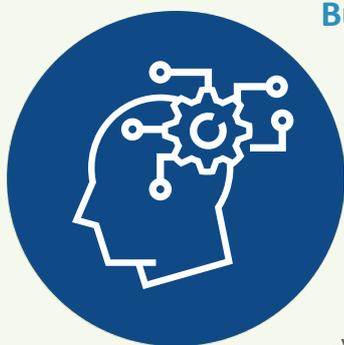
The UNCCD defines LDN as “a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security, remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems”².

The Centre provided significant support to UNCCD on LDN, contributing to its adoption as a guiding principle for the implementation of the Convention in 2018-2030. This included support to the organization of regional capacity building workshops to introduce the [“Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality”](#), piloting LDN target setting in selected countries and supporting national efforts on SLM and restoration.

2.2.1 LDN Target Setting

The Centre channelled its support to countries’ preparedness to achieve LDN through the LDN Target Setting Programme, a multi-partner initiative led by the UNCCD. This included the:

- Organization of regional capacity building workshops for countries in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus to introduce the LDN Scientific Conceptual Framework, and train participants on the use of the LDN target setting methodology; and
- Piloting of SDG target setting in 6 countries in Africa and Asia, i.e. Kenya, Mauritius, Somalia, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan and China. The outcomes of this initiative were shared with other countries during COP13 in Ordos, China.



Building Capacity for LDN (SDG Target 15.3)

In partnership with the UNCCD, the Centre supported the organization of three regional capacity building workshop to: 1) introduce the LDN Scientific Conceptual Framework; and 2) launch the LDN target setting process in selected countries. A total of 165 people participated in the workshops from 58 countries including: a) 88 people from 33 countries for the Africa Regional Workshop; b) 32 people from 9 countries for the Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia Workshop; and c) 45 people from 16 countries for the Asia and Pacific Workshop.

2 UNCCD, 2017. Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality

Supporting LDN Target Setting



In partnership with the Global Mechanism of UNCCD, the Centre provided technical assistance to six countries, namely China, Kyrgyzstan and Lebanon in Asia and Kenya, Mauritius and Somalia in Africa. Four building blocks formed the basis for the LDN target setting process:

1. *Leveraging LDN*: To identify country-specific opportunities and mobilize a wide range of stakeholders for LDN target setting and implementation;
2. *Assessing LDN*: To establish a baseline on the state of land degradation and assess the legal and institutional framework for SLM and restoration;
3. *Setting LDN Targets*: To define national and sub-national targets to achieve LDN by 2030;
4. *Achieving LDN*: To identify transformative projects/programs and potential financing to achieve the agreed LDN targets.

The LDN targets were successfully established in all six countries. The UNCCD Executive Secretary, Ms. Monique Barbut, travelled to Lebanon in June 2017 to launch the LDN targets under the patronage of the Prime Minister and met with the President of the Republic to kick-start the LDN implementation phase.



The good practices and lessons learnt from the LDN target setting exercise were shared with UNCCD country parties during a side event at COP13 - “Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality: Setting the Stage for Implementation” - organized by the Centre in partnership with UNCCD and the governments of China, Kenya and Lebanon. The event showcased the establishment of LDN targets under different policy, institutional and socio-ecological environments. Representatives from 21 countries participated in the event.



The Centre’s support to the LDN Target Setting Programme contributed to the significant progress achieved in LDN implementation. According to the Committee for Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), convened in March 2021, 102 countries have adopted LDN targets and associated measures to achieve them, leading to a global commitment to restore 450 million

hectares of degraded lands under UNCCD³. The total of all land restoration commitments - under the Rio Conventions and related initiatives – is estimated at one billion hectares by 2030⁴. Almost half of these commitments are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by Central and South America, China and South Asia.

2.2.2 Global Land Outlook

The Centre is a key partner of the [Global Land Outlook \(GLO\)](#), the UNCCD flagship publication providing thought leadership on sustainable land management and restoration. GLO underscores land system challenges, showcases transformative policies and practices, and points to cost-effective pathways to halt and reverse land degradation. As an international agreement on good land stewardship, UNCCD is leveraging GLO to inform the global drive towards LDN and implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

GLO1

The first edition of GLO ([GLO1](#)) was launched in September 2017 at COP13 in Ordos, China. The Centre supported the preparation of the working papers used to compile GLO1. A total of sixteen papers were prepared covering a wide range of issues including land use planning, integrated landscape management, scaling-up SLM and restoration of degraded land, etc. The GC-RED Director and Senior Technical Advisor represented UNDP in the GLO1 Steering Committee and contributed to the peer review of the working papers and final publication. A financial contribution was also provided for the editing, design, printing and translation of the report.

GLO1 highlights the central importance of land quality to human well-being, assesses current trends in land conversion, degradation and loss, identifies the driving factors and analyzes the impacts, provides scenarios for future challenges and opportunities, and presents a new and transformative vision for land management policy, planning and practice at global and national scales.

The publication reveals that the pressures on global land resources are greater than at any other time in human history. A rapidly increasing population, coupled with rising levels of consumption, is placing ever-larger demands on our land-based natural capital. Fortunately, the evidence presented in GLO1 demonstrates that informed and responsible decision-making, improved land management policies and practices, and simple changes in our everyday lives, can, if widely adopted, help to reverse the current worrying trends in the state of our land resources.

The working paper on “Land and Climate” was published as a policy brief titled, [‘Land Matters for Climate: Reducing the Gap and Approaching the Target’](#)⁵, ahead of the Paris Climate Summit in December 2015. The publication states that “the commitments contained in the UNCCD’s LDN targets – which envisage rehabilitating 12 million hectares of degraded land globally each year – could help close roughly 25% of the estimated emissions gap of 13 gigatonnes of equivalent CO₂ (GtCO₂e)”.

3 UNCCD. 2021. Update on the Implementation of Voluntary Land Degradation Neutrality Targets and Related Implementation Efforts

4 PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency. 2020. Goals and Commitments for the Restoration Decade

5 UNCCD. 2015. Land Matters for Climate: Reducing the Gap and Approaching the Target.

Building on the working paper on “Scaling-up Sustainable Land Management”, the Centre contributed to the development of a [Framework for Scaling Sustainable Land Management Options](#)⁶. This initiative was led by ICARDA, in collaboration with UNCCD. An expert group, including the Centre’s Senior Technical Advisor, studied the barriers and incentives to scaling technologies, processes, policies, or institutional arrangements. The group reviewed existing frameworks for scaling SLM interventions across a range of contexts, identified critical actions for success and developed a new action framework for scaling that analyses the contexts where specific SLM interventions can be scaled, so that SLM options can be screened and adapted to these contexts, piloted and disseminated. The study was published in 2018 in the international scientific journal, *Land Degradation and Development*.

GLO2

The Centre hosted the scoping meeting for [GLO2](#)⁷ at UNDP Headquarters in New York in May 2018. Twenty-seven experts attended the meeting presenting diverse perspectives, expertise and experiences from around the world. While the “educated general public” was viewed as a laudable target audience for GLO1, the meeting concluded that GLO2 should have a strong “solutions orientation” targeting “technical advisors to decision-makers”, i.e. those with the power to affect change.

The Steering Committee, in its meeting at COP14 in New Delhi in September 2019, decided that GLO2 will be a strategic communications publication of the UNCCD to inform the implementation of the [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030](#). The Centre contributed to the peer review of the working papers and final publication.

GLO2 was published in April 2022, ahead of UNCCD COP15 in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire. Titled “Land Restoration for Recovery and Resilience”, it aims to support the vision of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration with an evidence-based appraisal of where things stand and inspirational examples of restorative pathways from around the world. The report is structured as follows:

- Part One presents the multiple challenges to land systems, from the underlying biophysical processes to socio-economic demands. Land governance issues feature prominently, given their importance for the uptake and sustainability of restoration activities. Forward-looking scenarios quantify the potential effects of land restoration at global and regional levels.
- Part Two features case studies and good practices to illustrate how different stakeholders can create new social and governance norms, economic opportunities, and meaningful livelihoods through land restoration activities. Examples include green job creation, regenerative agriculture, and community-based solutions applied at different scales and in diverse contexts.
- Part Three synthesizes the lessons learned and showcases different restoration pathways within a new land agenda – one that leverages global synergies to restore balance with nature by engaging and empowering diverse stakeholders to act where they live and work.

The Centre co-organized with PBL, WUR and UNCCD, a side event at COP15 on the ‘[GLO2 Restoration Scenarios](#)’. The event was co-chaired by the UNCCD Chief Scientist and the Centre’s Senior Technical Advisor. It featured the global restoration commitments database, the study on the costs of

6 Thomas, R. et al. 2018. Framework for Scaling Sustainable Land Management Options. Published in *Land Degradation and Development*, Volume 29, Issue 10, October 2018

7 UNCCD. 2022. Global Land Outlook. Second Edition. Land Restoration for Recovery and Resilience.

restoration and the systematic review of benefits of restoration options. The GLO2 scenarios – i.e., Baseline, Restoration, Restoration & Protection – were introduced, generating a rich discussion on the challenges, opportunities and trade-offs associated with each scenario.

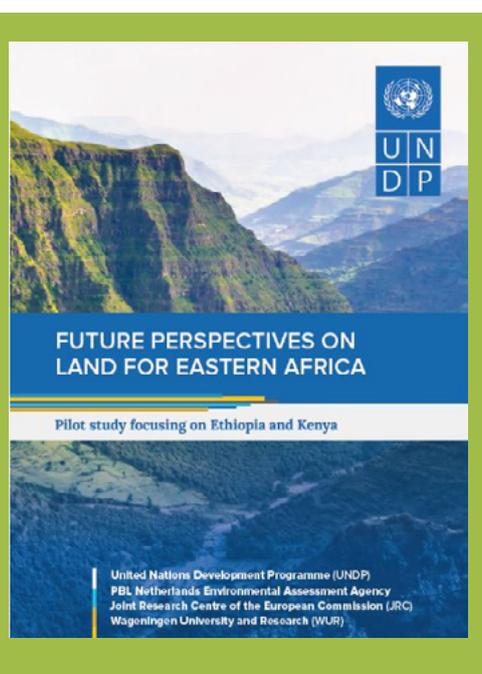
2.2.3 Scenarios for Policymaking

The evaluation of GLO1 called for “more emphasis on areas which face a ‘perfect storm’ of factors including land degradation, for testing the global scenarios within specific regions, and providing more detail at the regional or even country level”. In response to this recommendation, and at the request of the African Group of Negotiators at COP13, the Centre conducted the study “Future Perspectives on Land for Eastern Africa” in partnership with PBL, EC/JRC and WUR.

A proposal highlighting the objectives, approach and intended results of the study was submitted to the Third Regional Forum of the African Initiative for Combating Desertification (AI-CD), hosted by the Government of Kenya in Nairobi in May 2019. The AI-CD welcomed the initiative and recommended to start with a pilot study focusing on Kenya and Ethiopia.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Build capacity on the use of scenario studies and their application to national-level strategic policymaking in Kenya and Ethiopia on sustainable land use and management;
- Inform policymakers and stakeholders in Kenya and Ethiopia on recent trends (past 10–15 years) and potential future changes up to 2050 in land use and their impacts on agriculture, food supply and security
- Identify key challenges for both countries resulting from these trends, given current policies and policy objectives.



The final report of the study, “[Future Perspectives on Land for Eastern Africa – Pilot Study Focusing on Ethiopia and Kenya](#)”⁸, was published in May 2021 following an extensive peer-review process. The study zoomed in on the multiple land-use-related challenges faced by Ethiopia and Kenya. This included sharing and discussing data on economic and population growth, land use and land cover changes. The study addressed the issues of land degradation and drought and looked at changes in crop and livestock productivity and production, food availability and agricultural trade.

The authors developed scenarios on land use change and degradation up to 2050 and based these on internationally developed reference scenarios. They complemented these projections with analyses of current trends. They then compared these projections with policy plans and ambitions developed in both Ethiopia and Kenya. Government

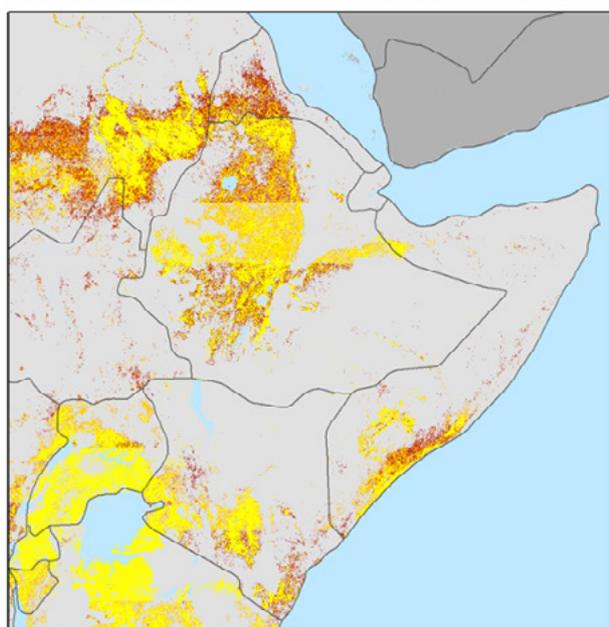
8 Berkhout, E., Kodosi, E., van den Berg, M., van Zeist, W., Mwandendu, R., van der Esch, S., Rembold, F., Meroni, M., Cherlet, M., 2021. Future Perspectives on land for Eastern Africa – pilot study focusing on Ethiopia and Kenya. UNDP, Nairobi, Kenya. Available from: <https://www1.undp.org/content/nairobi-gc-red/en/home/library/combating-land-degradation---securing-a-sustainable-future1.html>

representatives and stakeholders from both countries participated in a series of online meetings in which the data were discussed and analyzed.

The active engagement of scientists and government officials from both Ethiopia and Kenya strengthened ownership of this study. The data put forward could play an important role in devising ways to mitigate trade-offs or could form a basis for difficult policy choices. Further, many recent trends are in line with the more pessimistic forward-looking scenario, with high population growth and low growth of agricultural productivity, despite clear national policy aspirations aligned with the more optimistic scenario. In addition, the study revealed a gap between policy ambitions and actual trends. While goals may be in place, policy implementation is still key. Even in the optimistic scenario, some conversion of natural areas to agriculture occurs to meet future food demand, although such conversion is at odds with policy ambitions.

Changes in cropland and grazing area as per middle-of-the-road scenario (Shared Socioeconomic Pathway [SSP] 2)

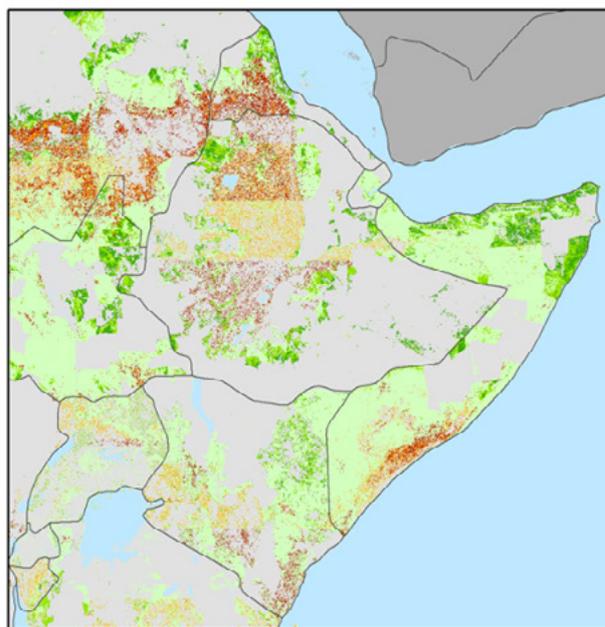
Change in cropland in East Africa under the SSP2 scenario



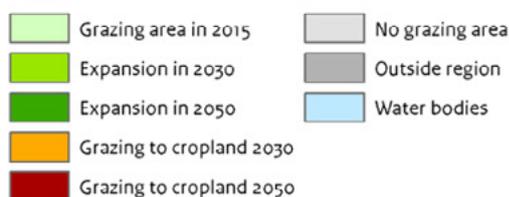
Legend



Change in grazing area in East Africa under the SSP2 scenario



Legend



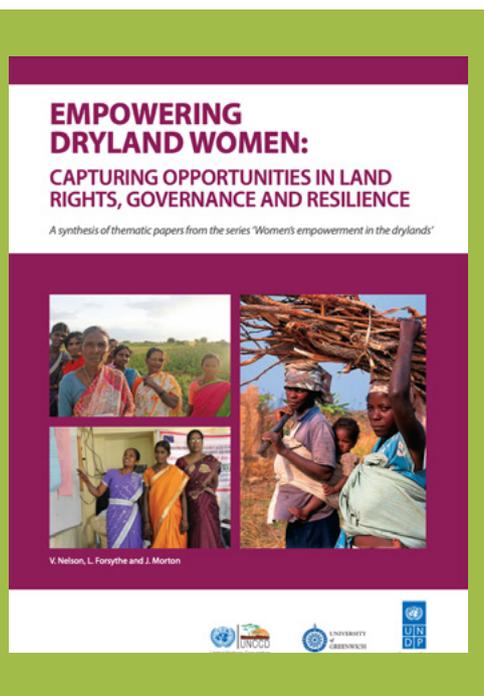
2.3 Gender Equality

The Centre invested significant efforts during this reporting period to advance the gender agenda of UNCCD. This included policy research on “Women’s Empowerment in Drylands”, advocacy and capacity building on “Mainstreaming Gender in UNCCD Implementation”, and the establishment of the “UNCCD Gender Caucus”.

2.3.1 Women's Empowerment in Drylands

In partnership with UNCCD and NRI, the Centre conducted applied policy research on “Women's Empowerment in the Drylands”, a priority for the Convention as defined in the “*Namib Declaration*” (decision 36/COP11). The objective of the research was to propose strategic actions in the policy, institutional and capacity spheres to reduce gender inequalities in the drylands with respect to land rights, governance and resilience.

Three thematic studies and one synthesis report were prepared. More specifically:



[Thematic study 1 - Strengthening dryland women's land rights: local contexts, global change](#) outlines various key opportunities existing for facilitating dryland women's empowerment with respect to land, in international research, policy, dialogue and practical action.

[Thematic study 2 - Gender and drylands governance: empowering women for change](#) focuses on the significant opportunities existing for facilitating dryland women's empowerment in governance, in the context of wider support for processes seeking greater democracy in dryland governance and values.

[Thematic study 3: Achieving dryland women's empowerment: environmental resilience and social transformation imperatives](#) highlights major opportunities to strengthen the resilience of dryland environments and for women to actively contribute to and benefit from sustainable drylands development.

These studies were formally launched in Ankara, Turkey, in October 2015 during [Gender Day](#) at COP12 under the theme “Women's Empowerment for a Land Degradation Neutral World”. The event was broadly attended with strong ownership at the highest level as reflected by the endorsement of this initiative by Ministers from Namibia and South Africa, the Executive Secretary of the Convention and the former President of Finland. This was reflected in the Ankara Ministerial Declaration (decision 9/COP12) in which the parties committed to “promote gender equality and the role of women as actors of change in addressing DLDD.”



These papers, along with a set of policy briefs, served to inform the policy dialogue in 2015-2017 on promoting gender equality in the implementation of the Convention, leading to the adoption of the UNCCD GAP by COP13 in September 2017. The purpose of the GAP is to make the Convention and the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework gender-responsive and transformative, and thus more effective and successful, by providing guidance to Parties and other actors on policies and practices to mainstream gender and achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

2.3.2 UNCCD Gender Action Plan

The Centre supported the implementation of the [UNCCD GAP](#) through advocacy and capacity building, tools and methodologies to mainstream gender and resource mobilization.



In partnership with UNCCD and UN Women, the Centre organized a pre-COP capacity building workshop on “Gender Mainstreaming in the Implementation of the UNCCD” in Ordos, China, in September 2017. The objective of this 2-day workshop was to build the gender expertise of COP13 delegates to enable them to address gender inequalities that undermine the effective implementation of the Convention and the achievement of LDN. The delegates were also trained on the

integration of gender considerations in decisions adopted by the Convention, with special attention on the proposed GAP. The workshop provided a forum to discuss this Plan and build consensus for its adoption by COP.

Moreover, the Centre supported the organization of the COP13 Gender Day under the theme “[Care about DLDD? Make Gender your Agenda](#)”. The discussions addressed the gender implications of the LDN Conceptual Framework, the support of UN Agencies to mainstream gender in UNCCD implementation, the mobilization of financial resources for the GAP and national experiences in gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment in the context of the Convention.

A side event, titled “Gender Equality: A Key for Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality”, was organized by the Centre with UNCCD, UN Women and IUCN during COP14 in New Delhi in September 2019. The event provided a platform to discuss the incorporation of gender perspectives into policies, programmes and interventions aiming at avoiding, reducing and reversing land degradation at local and national levels. The event, chaired by the Centre’s Senior Technical Advisor, was broadly attended by national focal points and representatives from civil society organizations. Two new resources were launched during the side event:



1. “[Land Degradation Neutrality – Interventions to Foster Gender Equality](#)”; and
2. “[A Manual for Gender-Responsive LDN Transformative Projects and Programmes](#)”.

The Centre contributed to the UNCCD’s resource mobilization efforts to support the implementation of the GAP. Along with UN Women, it supported the development of a proposal to “Catalyze the Implementation of the UNCCD GAP”. More specifically, this initiative aims to help countries achieve the priorities of the GAP, namely: 1) Enhancing women’s participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to implement the Convention; 2) Strengthening women’s economic



empowerment through activities to eradicate poverty; 3) Strengthening women’s land rights and access to resources; and 4) Enhancing women’s access to improved knowledge and technologies for effective UNCCD implementation.

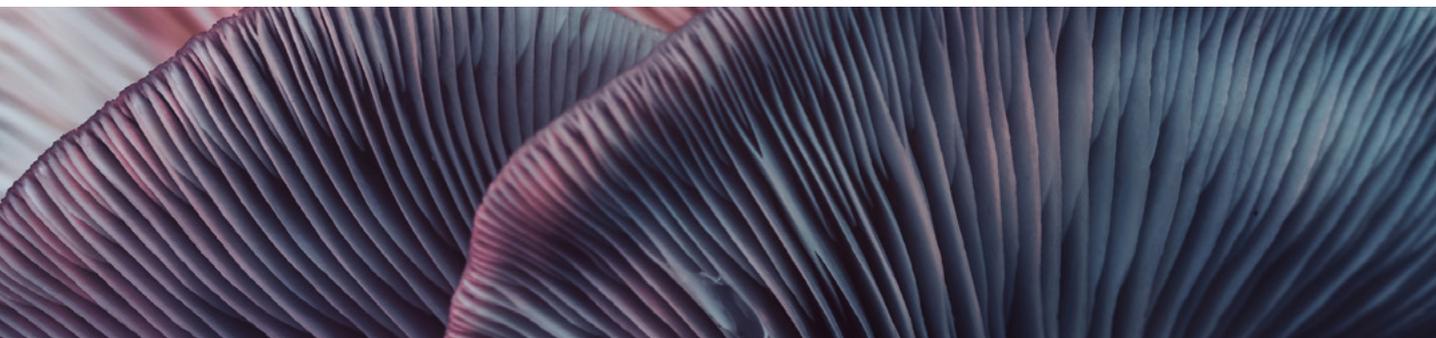
The Government of Canada accepted to fund this initiative through a “financial contribution of \$6 million to accelerate implementation of the UNCCD [GAP](#), as [announced by Prime Minister Trudeau in Senegal](#) in February 2020”⁹.

2.3.3 UNCCD Gender Caucus

The Centre supported the establishment of the Gender Caucus to provide a space for advancing gender equality within the implementation of the Convention. In collaboration with UNCCD, UN Women and IUCN, it contributed to the development of the terms of reference of the Caucus including its objectives, membership and modalities of participation.

First UNCCD Gender Caucus, COP14, New Delhi, September 2019

Together with UNCCD, UN Women and IUCN, the Centre organized the first “[UNCCD Gender Caucus](#)” at COP14. The overall objective of the Caucus is to “positively influence the course of events pertinent to gender equality and promote a gender responsive approach in the design and content of UNCCD-related decisions and programmes”. The Caucus reviewed the draft COP decision on [Drought \(COP \[14\]/16\)](#). The Centre’s Senior Technical Advisor facilitated this review to identify gaps and propose improvements to ensure that gender considerations are addressed in the decision as stipulated in the GAP.



9 UNCCD. 2017. Statement on World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought

Second UNCCD Gender Caucus, COP15, Abidjan, May 2022

The UNDP Associate Administrator participated in the [Gender Caucus](#), organized under the theme ‘In Pursuit of Gender Equality for Strong Land Stewardship’, at COP15. The purpose of this meeting was to call the attention of decision-makers to gender differences in the impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought and to galvanize collective efforts to act for lasting solutions that empower women and enhance gender equality.

The Associate Administrator stressed that ‘Improving gender equality and women’s empowerment are key principles of UNDP, enshrined in our Social and Environmental Safeguards Policy’. She presented an overview of UNDP’s support to countries on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the context of the Convention and concluded that ‘While on-the-ground measures are vital, we must also tackle the upstream determinants of gender equality. Success lies in taking a systems approach to addressing this challenge. We must be intentional in decisions and actions, to ensure that they put equality and empowerment of women at the centre of what we do.’

2.4 Resilience Building

Building the resilience of communities in drylands to shocks and stresses from climate-related risks and extreme events is the second thematic focus area of the Programme. During this reporting period, the Centre developed a conceptual framework to guide its work on socio-ecological resilience, provided capacity building support on resilience analysis, and offered technical advice on drought risk management.

2.4.1 Conceptual Framework

The Centre developed a conceptual framework to inform its resilience building activities under the Programme. The goal of this framework is to build the resilience of communities in dryland ecosystems to shocks and stresses from climate-related risks and extreme events, particularly drought. Its objective is to contribute to increased capacities of communities to protect development gains and achieve improved wellbeing outcomes in the face of shocks and stresses from extreme weather events. This will be achieved through the promotion of resilient development solutions for such communities by: 1) Nurturing inclusive and sustainable livelihoods; and 2) Supporting the sustainable management of land and water resources.

The Centre places a special focus on the interactions between social and ecological resilience. Social resilience refers to the capacity of individuals, households and larger groups (e.g., communities, administrative units, etc.) to respond to, adapt to and transform from the impacts of shocks and stresses, while ecological resilience refers to the capacity of ecosystems to respond to, withstand and absorb changes and disturbances. This two-tiered approach is based on the fact that majority of the populations in drylands are heavily dependent on ecological resources for their livelihoods.

Years of resilience research and interventions on the ground have revealed that the ability to overcome and bounce back (better) from shocks or stresses depends largely on a combination of a solid income/asset base and robust ecological services. The intervention logic adopted by the Centre is that by supporting communities and households to invest in improving the management and use of land and water resources, and enhancing their economic/livelihoods opportunities, the community’s social and ecological resilience will be strengthened in terms of absorptive, adaptive

and transformative capacities. Stable income and asset sources that are supported by productive and healthy ecosystems, will help minimize people’s exposure to shocks and stresses, enable them to make anticipatory and informed choices regarding livelihoods strategies, and promote an enabling environment for the optimal management of community resources.

Building on this framework and its experience in resilience measurement and analysis, the Centre contributed to the development of a free, trilingual, Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), titled “Introduction to Resilience for Development.” This course was a partnership effort involving SwedBio at the Stockholm Resilience Center (SRC), the Convention on Biological Diversity, El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Pronatura, the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans Forum, the Nature Conservancy and UNDP.



The e-lessons of the MOOC, highlighting the Centre’s work on resilience building at national and local levels, were launched during the Resilience 2017 conference organized by SRC in August 2017 in Stockholm, Sweden.

2.4.2 Resilience Analysis

[Community-Based Resilience Analysis \(CoBRA\)](#) is a tool developed by the Centre to help understand resilience from community and household perspectives based on the assumption that the building blocks of resilience vary from location to location. Using participatory methods, CoBRA strives to help local populations, who are affected by different shocks and stresses, describe and explain resilience on their own, based on their successful experiences to cope with these shocks and stresses.

[CoBRA Implementation Guidelines](#) were developed to support organizations interested in undertaking resilience assessments. Such organizations could include governments, NGOs and UN agencies. Ideally the assessment should be undertaken by multi-agency teams, to avoid bias in community response and reiterate the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder nature of resilience. The guidelines build on the methodology of the [CoBRA Conceptual Framework](#) and provide practical guidance.

The Centre supported the initiative “Implementing Urgent Adaptation Priorities through Strengthened Decentralised and National Development Plans” in Malawi, by facilitating the implementation of CoBRA assessments in three districts, i.e. Nkhata Bay, Ntcheu and Zomba, in 2017. Building on priority interventions selected in consultation with over one hundred communities, District Action Plans were developed to ensure that local planning and budgeting processes address local resilience-building needs. The results of the CoBRA assessments informed the government’s ongoing resilience planning efforts and were integrated into the various pillars of the Malawi National Resilience Strategy.



The Centre provided technical support to UNDP’s Regional Service Centre for Africa to help establish the Resilience Analysis Unit (RAU) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). RAU is a joint initiative between 5 UN agencies, namely UNDP, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the UN Children’s Fund, the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and IGAD. It aims to strengthen the capacity of IGAD, its Member States and relevant stakeholders to undertake resilience analysis at the household, community and national levels for evidence-based programme and policy design and implementation in different Horn of Africa contexts. The Centre’s CoBRA tool was recognized as one of RAU’s core methodological frameworks and was integrated into the unit’s resilience measurement and analysis activities at regional, national and sub-national levels.

2.4.3 Drought Resilience

“Droughts are one of the most feared natural phenomena in the world; they devastate farmland, destroy livelihoods and cause untold suffering. They occur when an area experiences a shortage of water supply due to a lack of rainfall or lack of surface or ground water. And they can last for weeks, months or years”¹⁰.

UNCCD Drought Initiative

The Centre contributed to the activities of UNCCD on drought resilience, the second pillar of the Convention. It supported the implementation of the [UNCCD Drought Initiative](#), adopted by COP13 in September 2017. The Initiative is based on the premise that the impact of a drought is not determined solely by the severity of the drought, but by the ability of communities and countries to anticipate and prepare for it.

- a. The Initiative aims to boost the resilience of people and ecosystems to drought by:
- b. Supporting the development of national drought plans;
- c. Promoting regional cooperation to reduce drought vulnerability and risk; and
- d. Providing a [toolbox](#) to drought stakeholders with easy access to tools, case studies and resources to support the design and implementation of the drought plans.

10 Quotation from: [Drought - The Drought Initiative | UNCCD](#)

Most countries already have some elements in place to respond to drought. However, the approaches are often not comprehensive, and the elements tend not to function well together. The Initiative aims to help countries prepare National Drought Plans (NDPs) to: a) put these elements together and identify the gaps hindering timely and effective response; and b) define what needs to happen as soon as the possibility of drought is signalled by the meteorological services (normally at least 3 months in advance). The plan is designed to help policymakers prioritize practical steps to mitigate the impacts of drought.

Mainstreaming Gender in National Drought Plans

The Centre contributed to the development of [Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender into National Drought Plans](#). The guidelines identify gender considerations and entry points to address them in the step-by-step approach described in the [Model Drought Plan](#) developed by UNCCD. The guidelines were shared with over 30 countries preparing their plans. The Centre helped review the first batch of drought plans (Algeria, Serbia and the Dominican Republic) to ensure that gender considerations were adequately addressed in the plans.

The Centre provided technical and financial support to develop the NDPs of Iran and Morocco. The plans were prepared through broad national consultations and consisted of three pillars:

1. *Drought Assessment* - including the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of drought, the national policy framework and institutional arrangements for drought risk management;
2. *Drought Action Plan* – covering the strategic pathways to mitigate and adapt to the effects of drought. These include: a) Strengthening governance and institutional coordination; b) Building resilience to drought; c) Generating and sharing knowledge; d) Building capacities of national and local actors; e) Establishing sustainable and flexible finance instruments; and f) Promoting research and development, regional and international cooperation.
3. *Implementation Modalities* – including governance arrangements, technical support, priority interventions, budget requirement, monitoring and evaluation.

Leading up to 2030, UNCCD will support around 70 affected countries in developing and implementing NDPs to improve the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems, in line with Strategic Objective 3 of the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework.

Integrated Drought Management Programme

The Centre represented UNDP in the Advisory Committee of the [Integrated Drought Management Programme \(IDMP\)](#), a global initiative led by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the Global Water Partnership (GWP), to provide policy guidance and scientific information, knowledge and best practices for integrated drought management.

The Centre contributed to the peer review of two IDMP knowledge products, namely: “[Drought and Water Scarcity](#)” and “[Integrated Drought Management Framework](#)”. The former is a policy note articulating the difference between drought and water scarcity, with case studies from around the world. The latter

is a technical report on the integrated, risk-based approach, to drought management centred around three pillars: Drought Monitoring and Early Warning Systems; Vulnerability and Impact Assessment; and Drought Mitigation, Preparedness and Response. The report will be available for publication shortly.

Materials developed by the Centre were used to deliver the e-Learning Course on Drought Risk Management/Reduction organized by the IDMP in June 2022. These included: [Mainstreaming Drought Risk Management: A Primer](#); [CoBRA Implementation Guidelines](#); and [Understanding Community Resilience: Findings from CoBRA Assessments](#).

IDMP is actively supporting international processes on drought risk management, including the UNCCD Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on Drought. UNCCD COP15 recognized the critical role of IDMP and invited it, with its cooperating partners including UNDP, to support Parties in: a) Enhancing their capacity to collect, analyze and interpret data on resilience indicators; b) Integrating the findings from drought resilience assessments into drought resilience planning; and d) Facilitating coordination and interaction between the land restoration and drought risk management communities. It called on the IDMP to continue backstopping the IWG on Drought in 2022-2024.



It called on the IDMP to continue backstopping the IWG on Drought in 2022-2024.

Eleven out of the thirty-eight COP15 decisions are directly related to enhancing drought resilience, including agreement to:

- Boost drought resilience through the promotion of large-scale integrated landscape investment programmes;
- Improve national policies and early warning, monitoring, and assessment as related to drought risk management;
- Improve efforts around capacity building, sharing of knowledge and lessons, and coordination towards these efforts at the regional level;
- Pursue the work of the IWP on Drought in 2022-2024 to support the shift from reactive to proactive drought management; and
- Translate plans and instruments into actions through partnership building and resource mobilization, and request the GEF to support the implementation of NDPs and relevant policies.

2.5 Sand and Dust Storms

On behalf of UNDP, the Centre supported the inter-agency effort leading to the establishment of the United Nations Coalition on Combatting Sand and Dust Storms (SDS). It contributed to the elaboration of the Coalition's [Terms of Reference](#), [Strategy](#) and [Action Plan for 2020-2022](#). The mandate of the Coalition is to promote and coordinate a collaborative UN system response to the growing challenge of SDS, on local, regional, and global scales, to ensure that unified and coherent action is taken.

The Strategy includes five elements: 1) Enhancing UN inter-agency collaboration; 2) Advocacy and awareness-raising; 3) Exchange of information and capacity building; 4) Development of a “platform” for SDS; and 5) Fund raising. The activities defined in the Action Plan for 2020-2022 will be delivered through five working groups: 1) Mitigation and Adaptation; 2) Forecasting and Early Warning; 3) Health and Safety; 4) Policy and Governance; and 5) Mediation and Regional Collaboration.

The Centre co-led with FAO Working Group (WG) 1 - Mitigation and Adaptation, building on its experience in SLM and drought risk management, as well as UNDP’s large project portfolio in SDS-affected countries. It attended the meetings of the Coalition and contributed to the Annual Report of the UN Secretary-General to the UN General Assembly on SDS. The report outlines relevant developments in terms of international efforts in the area of SDS, including the activities of the Coalition. It covers the following themes: Monitoring, Prediction and Early Warning; Impact Mitigation, Vulnerability and Resilience; Source Mitigation; and Cross-Cutting Developments.

The substantive focus areas of WG1 includes:

1. Source mitigation to control the anthropogenic drivers of SDS such as unsustainable use of agricultural land, deforestation, overgrazing, depletion of water sources and industrial activities; and
2. Coping with the socio-economic impacts of SDS on human health, agriculture, energy, industry, transportation, infrastructure, water and air quality.

Since the launch of the Coalition at UNCCD COP14 in September 2019, WG1 achieved significant progress with the implementation of its agreed activities in 2020-2022, namely the development of the SDS Toolbox; formulation of the SDS Programme; and organization of SDS Day at COP15.

SDS Toolbox

The Centre contributed to the development of the UNCCD-led [SDS Toolbox](#) to help countries adopt a proactive approach to prevent and cope with SDS. This online platform presents tools and best practices for risk and vulnerability assessment, source mapping, and anthropogenic source control and mitigation options.

The Centre’s contribution builds on its experience in SLM to help countries control the anthropogenic drivers of SDS (i.e. source mitigation). It consists in analyzing the SDS responsiveness of the SLM Technologies and Approaches stored in the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT)¹¹ database and to make the relevant practices available to global users in the frame of the SDS Toolbox. The aim is to support land use planners, project designers and implementers to identify SDS-responsive SLM options, in the frame of, for example, LDN initiatives or the UN Decade on Ecosystems Restoration.

The SDS decision adopted by COP15 in May 2022 requested the UNCCD Secretariat to “continue developing the SDS Toolbox and supporting the capacity of country Parties to use it”¹². The launch of the Toolbox is expected in early 2023.

11 WOCAT: World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies

12 UNCCD. 2022. Decision 26/COP.15. Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Sand and dust storms

SDS Programme

WG1 developed a project proposal for submission to potential donors to fund its activities on SDS mitigation and adaptation. A concept note titled “Sand and Dust Storms and Land Degradation Neutrality – Interlinkages” was developed by FAO, in collaboration with the Centre and UNCCD. The note articulates the elements of a proposed SDS Programme focusing on the agriculture sector. The main objective of the Programme is to strengthen the resilience of agriculture-dependent communities affected by increasing exposure to climate change enhanced risks and impacts of SDS while reducing and/or reversing land degradation. It will implement SDS source and impact risk management technologies, improve the capacity of agricultural populations to adapt to SDS hazards, and promote regional transboundary cooperation on SDS.

The concept note was discussed with stakeholders and potential donors during UNCCD COP15 in May 2022. Efforts are underway to convert the note into a full-fledged programme, in-line with the COP15 decision calling upon UNCCD to “participate actively in the UN Coalition on Combating SDS and enhance cooperation and collaboration with UN agencies including for developing a global implementation initiative on SDS to address anthropogenic SDS sources and data/information gaps”¹².

SDS Day at UNCCD/COP15

SDS Day was organized by the SDS Coalition during COP15 at the Rio Conventions Pavilion. It served as a platform to raise awareness about SDS and provide an opportunity for knowledge sharing and capacity development among stakeholders/partners involved in SDS issues. These included representatives from affected countries involved in policy and decision making, implementation and science, field practitioners and local communities, as well as Coalition members. SDS Day provided a launchpad for initiatives, products and projects including the SDS Compendium, and an early look at the SDS Toolbox under development.

The outcomes of SDS Day served to inform the COP15 decision on SDS, including on resource mobilization to scale-up action on the ground. The decision requested “the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD, within its scope and mandate, to support the development of transformative projects and programmes and financing options related to anthropogenic SDS source mitigation”.



3. Good Practices and Lessons Learnt

The Programme has accumulated considerable knowledge on sustainable dryland development and UNCCD implementation. This section provides a synthesis of the good practices and lessons learnt from its implementation.

3.1 UNCCD Partnership

UNCCD was represented on the GC-RED Programme Board, providing strategic guidance and direction for the development of annual workplans. Programme activities were aligned with the biennial workplans of the Convention and contributed to their implementation. This synergy was beneficial for advancing global thinking and action on strategic priorities of the Convention including LDN, gender equality and women's empowerment, drought resilience, and SDS. This is clearly reflected in the successful collaboration on the Global Land Outlook, LDN Target Setting Programme, GAP, UNCCD Drought Initiative and SDS Coalition.

Now that countries have established LDN targets and developed NDPs, significant efforts are needed to support the development and financing of transformative projects and programmes to support implementation on the ground. The partnership with the UNCCD should prioritize support to countries to design bankable projects that integrate UNCCD priorities. This could be achieved through UNDP's engagement in the newly established UNCCD Project Preparation Partnership (PPP). Discussions have been initiated to define the modalities of UNDP's contribution to the PPP.

The partnership with the UNCCD is an effective vehicle for supporting the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030. Over 100 countries have adopted LDN targets and associated measures to achieve them, leading to a global commitment to restore 450 million hectares of degraded lands under UNCCD. Scaling-up UNDP's support to UNCCD/LDN implementation will help translate these commitments into concrete actions within the framework of the Decade.

3.2 UNDP Offer

The Programme facilitated the integration of UNDP's work on SLM/restoration and UNCCD implementation into a policy and programme offer, building on the experience and expertise of the Centre and GEF Unit. This offer was articulated in the position papers prepared for the UNCCD COPs, describing UNDP's response to the land degradation challenge, its integrated policy and programme approach and support to the implementation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework.

The position paper "Combatting Land Degradation – Securing a Sustainable Future" (COP14, 2019) describes UNDP's three-pronged approach on land degradation and UNCCD implementation as follows:

1. Developing individual, institutional and systemic capacity for SLM/Restoration at landscape, national and regional levels and catalyzing upscaling of interventions by connecting local actions to national and international policies, finance and technical support and facilitating partnerships;
2. Undertaking applied policy research and analysis and providing evidence on policies and good practices in SLM/Restoration that optimize livelihoods, jobs and food security;

3. Assisting countries to identify, access, combine and sequence environmental finance, including from the GEF Trust Fund and GEF-managed funds, including the Special Climate Change Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Adaptation Fund; and the Green Climate Fund and other bilateral donor and private sector funding.

This integrated approach helped position UNDP as a valued partner for global work on land degradation and UNCCD implementation. UNDP's contribution to COP13 – the landmark COP that adopted the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework – was strongly acknowledged by the Convention's Executive Secretary.

In May 2022, the Centre led UNDP's participation in [Land Restoration Day at COP15](#). In partnership with the Governments of Cameroon, Malawi and Kazakhstan, it organized the side event 'Land Restoration for People and Planet – UNDP Ecosystem Restoration Promise'. The objective was to showcase UNDP supported efforts on land restoration and introduce the proposed Ecosystem Restoration Promise. This initiative will initially support 30 countries with key capacity needs that prevent the successful translation of restoration pledges into action. The Promise will be an integral part of UNDP's SLM/Restoration offer to support LDN implementation under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

To date, the collaboration between the Centre and the GEF Unit was driven by the professionalism, willingness and team spirit of staff members. There is no formal arrangement governing this collaboration in terms of reporting lines, staffing and financial resources. This "ad-hoc" approach could weaken UNDP's position as a valued partner on SLM/Restoration and UNCCD implementation. Considering the critical role of "Land" in achieving SDGs, a formal management arrangement with dedicated staffing and funding should be established.

3.3 Thought Leadership

The Centre's thought leadership on sustainable land management and restoration was strengthened through its collaboration with reputable research institutions and the alignment of its applied policy research with the strategic priorities of the UNCCD.

In partnership with NRI, the Centre conducted its policy research on "Women's Empowerment in the Drylands", a priority for the UNCCD. It proposed strategic actions in the policy, institutional and capacity spheres to reduce gender inequalities with respect to land rights, governance and resilience. This work served to inform the policy dialogue on promoting gender equality in the implementation of the UNCCD, leading to the adoption of the first-ever GAP of the Convention.

The Centre is a main contributor to GLO, the UNCCD flagship publication providing thought leadership on SLM and restoration. GLO1 provided a new and transformative vision for land management policy, planning and practice at global and national scales. GLO2 will support the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration with an evidence-based appraisal of where things stand and examples of restorative pathways from around the world.

The Centre explored the use of scenario projections to inform SLM/Restoration policymaking at the regional and national levels. This innovative research was conducted in partnership with PBL, EC/JRC and WUR. Its outcomes helped inform policymakers and stakeholders in Eastern Africa on recent trends and potential future changes up to 2050 in land use and their impacts on agriculture, food supply and security.

These examples illustrate the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the Centre's thought leadership. The research was conducted by a small team of seasoned professionals, building on the Centre's partnerships with UNCCD and renowned research institutions. Limited funding, from the (now-closed) UNDP Trust Fund to Combat Desertification and Drought, was made available for this work. The budget agreed by the UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) for the Centre's policy research and thought leadership, as per the signed Programme document, did not materialize. With the UNSO resources now depleted, the Centre's thought leadership role is seriously compromised unless financial resources are allocated for this purpose by BPPS.

3.4 Sustainability of Achievements

The alignment of Programme activities with the strategic priorities and workplans of UNCCD contributed to the sustainability of the results achieved. There is clear evidence that the achievements on LDN, gender equality and drought resilience will be sustained, even scaled-up, following the closure of the Programme.

The Programme supported the Convention's preparatory work on LDN, contributing to its adoption as a guiding principle for UNCCD implementation in 2018-2030. Through its support to LDN target setting, the Programme helped countries lay critical foundations for reaching the long-term objective of halting and reversing land degradation. Over 100 countries have adopted LDN targets and there is a growing momentum to advance implementation under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The eighth GEF replenishment cycle (GEF-8), in 2022-2026, will support the implementation of transformative projects and programmes to help countries reach their LDN targets. The LDN Fund, managed by MIROVA (private asset manager), mobilized capital from both public and private investors, and projects were initiated in several countries. The Fund's project portfolio is growing, resulting in the promotion of land as a new asset class among investors. Climate financing, including from the Green Climate Fund, is available to catalyze land-based solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The investment of the Programme in LDN will thus be sustained beyond its closure.

The Centre leveraged its long-standing experience in drought resilience to support the implementation of the UNCCD Drought Initiative. Leading up to 2030, the UNCCD will support around 70 countries to develop and implement NDPs. Eleven out of the thirty-eight COP15 decisions were directly related to enhancing drought resilience, including agreement to build national capacities and promote large-scale integrated landscape investment programmes. The IWG on Drought will pursue its work in 2022-2024. COP15 made a strong call to support the implementation of NDPs including through GEF. With the increased global attention to drought, the work initiated by the Programme will grow in the coming years within the framework of UNCCD.

The applied policy research on "Women's Empowerment in the Drylands" made a critical contribution to the implementation of the Convention. This work, along with the capacity building activities on gender mainstreaming in UNCCD implementation, served to inform the policy dialogue leading to the adoption of the GAP. Financial resources have been, and will continue to be, mobilized to support the implementation of the GAP in the coming years.

The Programme supported the establishment of the UN Coalition on Combatting SDS. It helped develop a concept note to help raise funding for the Coalition's activities. The note was discussed with potential donors at UNCCD COP15 in May 2022, but no funding commitments have been made to date. Significant additional efforts are needed to ensure the sustainability of the SDS work due to the lack of funding. The COP15 decision, calling on the international community to increase financial flows for combatting SDS, presents an opportunity to correct this situation.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Programme served to channel the Centre's support to UNCCD, particularly for the implementation of the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework. UNCCD was represented on the Programme Board, providing strategic guidance and direction for the development of annual workplans. Policy research was conducted in partnership with reputable academic and research institutions such as NRI, EC/JRC, PBL, ICARDA and WUR, with contributions from team leads and members of the GPN. Country activities were designed in response to expressed needs and implemented by UNDP country offices. The main conclusions (C) and recommendations (R) of the Programme are discussed below.

4.1 Conclusions

- C1. The Centre provided significant support to UNCCD on Land Degradation Neutrality, contributing to its adoption as a guiding principle for the implementation of the Convention in 2018-2030.** This included the organization of regional capacity building workshops to introduce the “Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality”, piloting LDN target setting in selected countries and supporting national efforts on sustainable land management and restoration. The support to the LDN Target Setting Programme helped advance implementation on the ground. Over 100 countries adopted LDN targets and associated measures to achieve them, resulting into a global commitment to restore 450 million hectares of degraded lands under the UNCCD.
- C2. The Centre is a key partner of the Global Land Outlook, the UNCCD flagship publication providing thought leadership on sustainable land management and restoration.** As a member of the GLO Steering Committee, it provided strategic guidance and direction, hosted technical meetings and contributed to working papers and peer review processes. The first edition (GLO1), launched in September 2017 at COP13, provided a new and transformative vision for land management policy, planning and practice at global and national scales. The second edition (GLO2) was published in April 2022, ahead of COP15, to support the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
- C3. The Centre's policy research on “Women's Empowerment in the Drylands”, and its advocacy and capacity building activities on gender mainstreaming with UNCCD and UN Women, served to inform the policy dialogue leading to the adoption of the UNCCD GAP.** Positive trends are already emerging indicating that awareness about gender issues has increased among UNCCD country parties. A quantitative analysis of COP14 decisions shows that the number of decisions that included references to gender issues has increased by 75 per cent as compared to COP13. The establishment of the Gender Caucus will boost the implementation of the GAP by gathering strong gender advocates during COP meetings and beyond, and mobilizing support to translate commitments into concrete actions on the ground.
- C4. The Centre explored the use of scenario projections to support policymaking on sustainable land management and restoration.** This work, conducted in partnership with PBL, EC/JRC and WUR, helped inform government officials and stakeholders in Eastern Africa on recent trends and potential future changes up to 2050 in land use and their impacts on agriculture, food supply and security. Using the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways model, three scenarios were projected forward to 2050: SSP1 (Sustainability or the Green Road), SSP2 (Middle of the Road), and SSP3 (Fragmentation or the Rocky Road). Adapting the global scenario approach to

the national level allows decision-makers to better manage trade-offs and identify priorities to achieve development goals, today and in the future.

- C5. Leveraging its experience in drought resilience, the Centre contributed to the implementation of the UNCCD Drought Initiative and WMO-led Integrated Drought Management Programme.** It supported the development of National Drought Plans, the preparation of knowledge products, and the organization of capacity building activities on Drought Risk Management. Leading up to 2030, the UNCCD will support over 70 countries on drought, reflecting the urgency to tackle this disaster as its frequency and intensity increase due to climate change.
- C6. The Centre played an active role in the establishment of UN Coalition on Combatting Sand and Dust Storms, and co-led with FAO the Working Group on SDS Mitigation and Adaptation.** It contributed to the elaboration of the Coalition’s Terms of Reference, Strategy and Action Plan for 2020-2022, the launch of the SDS Compendium and the development of the SDS Toolbox. There is a pressing need to mobilize financial resources for the continuity of this work. COP15 called upon the international community to increase financial flows for combatting SDS, including addressing anthropogenic SDS sources and data/information gaps.
- C7. The Programme facilitated the consolidation of UNDP’s work on SLM and UNCCD implementation into an integrated policy and programme offer, building on the experience and expertise of the Centre and GEF Unit.** This approach helped position UNDP as a valued partner for global work on land degradation and UNCCD implementation. UNDP’s contribution was strongly acknowledged by successive Executive Secretaries of the Convention (i.e. “the significant achievements of the Ordos Conference of the Parties (COP13) were made possible by UNDP’s contribution and the support provided through the Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification”; and “UNDP played a significant role in making COP14 a milestone for the land restoration movement”).
- C8. The alignment of Programme activities with the strategic priorities and workplans of the UNCCD contributed to the sustainability of the results achieved.** There is strong evidence that the achievements on LDN, gender equality and drought resilience will be sustained, even scaled-up, following the closure of the Programme.
- C9. The Centre’s thought leadership on sustainable land management and restoration was strengthened through its collaboration with reputable academic and research institutions.** The relevance and effectiveness of the Centre’s thought leadership and applied policy research contributed to the adoption of land degradation neutrality, gender equality and women’s empowerment as guiding principles for UNCCD implementation.

4.2 Recommendations

- R1. Building on the strong achievements of the Programme and its successful partnership with the UNCCD, UNDP should scale-up its support to the implementation of the Convention’s 2018-2030 Strategic Framework.** Now that countries have established LDN targets and prepared NDPs, this support should prioritize the development and financing of transformative projects and programmes to support concrete action on the ground. The partnership with UNCCD is an effective vehicle for channelling UNDP’s support to the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

- R2. The collaboration on the development of investment-ready project proposals to address land degradation and drought could be channelled through the Project Preparation Partnership, established recently by UNCCD.** This could include: a) The creation of an information-sharing protocol to ensure that country requests that target funds to which UNDP is accredited are communicated to UNCCD as early as possible; and b) Establishing a project technical review process between UNCCD and UNDP to improve quality and integration, and align with relevant funding mechanisms.
- R3. The alignment of the Centre’s thought leadership and applied policy research with the strategic priorities of the UNCCD should be maintained.** The research on “Women’s Empowerment in the Drylands” and support to the Global Land Outlook are clear examples of the Centre’s contribution to the development of a transformative vision for land management policy, planning and practice. The expertise on scenario projections should be developed further to better inform policymaking on sustainable land management and restoration in partner countries. The Centre’s partnerships with academic and research institutions should be strengthened and expanded in the future.
- R4. UNDP should pursue its engagement in the UN Coalition on Combatting Sand and Dust Storms** leveraging its expertise in SLM and restoration, country and regional level presence, and experience in environmental finance through vertical funds. There is a pressing need to support the Coalition’s resource mobilization efforts to ensure the continuity of its activities and the scaling-up of policy, technical and capacity building assistance to countries to tackle the growing exposure to climate change enhanced risks and impacts of SDS.
- R5. UNDP’s integrated policy and programme offer on sustainable land management and restoration and UNCCD implementation should be strengthened further through:**
- a. The establishment of a formal management arrangement governing the leadership and coordination of this work between the different UNDP units (i.e. The Centre; UNDP/GEF; Small Grant Programme; etc.);
 - b. The allocation of dedicated human and financial resources to support the Centre’s thought leadership mandate and applied policy research, and enhance UNDP’s position as a valued global partner in this area; and
 - c. Raising the profile of and resources allocated for the UNCCD – as an international agreement on good land stewardship - in UNDP’s development agenda, considering the importance of land for achieving the SDGs, particularly the goals on poverty eradication, gender equality, food security, biodiversity and climate change.
- R6. Moving forward, UNDP should decide on how best to pursue its dedicated support to the UNCCD building on the achievements, conclusions and recommendations of the Programme.** This includes agreement on the leadership and distribution of this work to scale-up support to the implementation of UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework. The management arrangement should cover the integration of policy and programme support functions particularly in the areas of sustainable land management and restoration and drought risk management.

Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Office in Nairobi, Gigiri
Block M, Middle Level, P.O. Box 30218, 00100
Nairobi, Kenya

phone: + 254 20 762 4640/42

email: gc-red@undp.org

website: www.undp.org/policy-centre/nairobi

twitter: @UNDP_GCRED