

**TECHNICAL NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT**

**DRAFT RESOLUTION ENTITLED**

**STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO HALT LAND DEGRADATION, RESTORE DEGRADED LANDS AND INCREASE ECOSYSTEM AND COMMUNITIES DROUGHT RESILIENCE**

*Submitted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 10 December 2023*

This technical note has been prepared by the UNEP Secretariat as background information in support of upcoming consultations and negotiations on the draft resolution. It outlines *inter alia* the following information: 1) relation to UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy and Programme of Work and to existing UNEA resolutions/decisions as applicable, 2) an initial legal assessment and 3) a preliminary budget implications outlining for implementing the draft.

The Draft resolution on Strengthening international efforts to halt land degradation, restore degraded lands and increase ecosystem and communities drought resilience follows the UNEA-2 resolutions on [Sand and Dust Storms](#) and [Combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands](#) and the UNEA-4 resolutions on [Innovation on Biodiversity and land degradation](#) and [innovations in sustainable rangelands and pastoralism](#) and [UNGA Resolution 73/284 on United Nations Decade on Ecosystems Restoration \(2021-2030\)](#) and the UNEA-5 resolution on [Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development](#). The draft resolution emphasizes with concern the continuous trend in land degradation resulting in desertification and exacerbating drought impacting increasing numbers of human populations and makes more specific requests of Member States and of UNEP.

Among other provisions, the draft resolution calls on Member States to establish and invest in disaster risk management, early warning systems and safety-net programmes to communities to cope with extreme conditions of drought, flooding and sand storms, and encourages Member States to develop and enforce, as appropriate national drought and land degradation strategies and voluntary target to achieve land degradation neutrality. The draft resolution also calls on the private and public sectors in Member States to adopt appropriate enabling policies and to reinforce their investment efforts in the development, adaptation and scaling up of sustainable land management and restoration, and drought resilience technologies and to adopt nature-based solutions.

It requests the Executive Director to support Member States by:

- A. Working on strengthening relevant existing global partnerships and initiatives needed to reach land degradation neutrality, ecosystem restoration and building resilience of communities and ecosystems to drought;

- B. Assuring that the land degradation crisis is part of UNEP's core strategy alongside climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution/waste crises;
- C. Promoting Member States' engagement in the Middle East Green Initiative and the G20 Global Land Initiative;
- D. Supporting the UNCCD and other partners to mobilize finances for Member States affected by land degradation and drought;
- E. Coordinating with the Secretariat of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms and others to continue their efforts to assist affected country parties in developing and implementing national and regional policies and plans to reduce sand and dust storms and their impacts on human and environment health;
- F. Coordinating and collaborating with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat and other partners including the Earth Observation community, to ensure global data availability for Small Island Developing States and hyper-arid areas, review methodologies for estimating land-based progress indicators to improve assessment and to strengthen the provision of capacity development support to Parties to undertake assessments and participatory mapping of appropriate indicators in their degraded lands.

**i) Relation to UNEP's Medium Term Strategy and Programme of Work:**

The draft resolution relates to all three of the thematic subprogrammes on nature, climate and chemicals and pollution since addressing land degradation can make substantive contributions to the objectives in all three areas. Specifically, it relates to the three Outcomes of the Nature action subprogramme: An economically and socially sustainable pathway for halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity is established (Outcome 2A); Sustainable management of nature is adopted and implemented in development frameworks (Outcome 2B); and Nature conservation and restoration are enhanced (Outcome 2C). It further relates to Outcome 1A (Decision-makers at all levels adopt decarbonization, dematerialisation and resilience pathways) and Outcome 1B (Countries and stakeholders have increased capacity, finance and access to technologies to deliver on the adaptation and mitigation goals of the Paris Agreement) of the Climate change action subprogramme. In addition, it relates to Outcome 3A (Human health and environmental outcomes are optimized through enhanced capacity and leadership in the sound management of chemicals and waste) of the Chemicals and Pollution action subprogramme.

The resolution is related to Paragraph 33 of the MTS (*UNEP will support an integrated and balanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will continue to build the capacity of Member States and partners to integrate the environment into all aspects of sustainable development, leveraging the interactions and co-benefits of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals*), since sustainable land management can make a significant contribution to the achievement of many of the SDGs. The resolution is also related to Paragraph 41 of the MTS (*Special attention will be paid to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*) since addressing land degradation and building resilience to drought can contribute significantly to the reducing the risk of disasters.

ii) **Legal aspects:**

The draft resolution's emphasis on land degradation and drought intersects with the objectives of the UNCCD. The UNCCD is the primary international legal framework addressing desertification and drought, with a commitment to mitigate the impact of land degradation and protect land. Its Convention text provides a comprehensive definition of "land degradation" as *"reduction or loss, in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of rainfed cropland, irrigated cropland, or range, pasture, forest and woodlands resulting from land uses or from a process or combination of processes, including processes arising from human activities and habitation patterns, such as: soil erosion caused by wind and/or water; deterioration of the physical, chemical and biological or economic properties of soil; and long-term loss of natural vegetation"*.

Several UNCCD COP decisions also relate to land degradation and drought. Examples include

- Decision 18/COP.4 "Dryland Degradation Assessment and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment"
- Decision 18/COP.9 "Measures to enable the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and mitigation of the effects of drought"
- Decision 8/COP.10 "Follow-up to the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development relevant to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on 'Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication' and the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development"
- Decision 22/COP.15 "The positive role that measures taken under the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that causes migration"
- Decision 3/COP.15 "Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality"
- Decision 7/COP.13 "The future strategic framework of the Convention", inter alia, "[s]trongly encourages Parties to apply and, as appropriate, align with the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework in their national policies, programmes, plans and processes relating to desertification/land degradation and drought, including in their National Action Programmes, as appropriate". This includes a focus on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), a key concept introduced into the global dialogue by the UNCCD, accepted by the international community during the Rio+20 conference in 2012 and adopted as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. LDN aims to preserve the land resource base by ensuring no net loss of healthy and productive land via a combination of measures that avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also plays a significant role in addressing land degradation globally. FAO's work includes developing methodologies and tools for assessing land degradation, providing policy support to Member States, and facilitating capacity building and

knowledge sharing. For example, the Global Soil Partnership fosters the implementation of proactive policies and actions to ensure healthy soils and prevent land degradation. FAO also supports countries in implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, which provide technical and policy advice on sustainable soil management. FAO's Strategic Framework 2022-31 outlines FAO's strategy for supporting sustainable agriculture and addressing challenges such as land degradation. FAO's Action Against Desertification outlines FAO's efforts to combat desertification, land degradation, and drought, particularly in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, in line with the objectives of the UNCCD. FAO also contributes to LDN with its expertise in policy development on sustainable land management and addressing land degradation, including governance and land rights, and on its role as the foremost global custodian of agricultural information for the FAO country members. FAO is focusing its efforts on deploying methodological tools and strengthening the capacity of countries to collect data, mainly through FAOSTAT and to use FAO products to analyse such data, including Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands, Global Agro-Ecological Zones, Global Land Cover-Share, Collect Earth, and the statistical resources of the Global Soil Partnership (which FAO hosts). FAO also produces reports on land degradation. For example, in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), FAO has produced the 2021 report "Land Degradation Neutrality: a rationale for using participatory approaches to monitor and assess rangeland health".

UNEP and FAO co-lead the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration which aims to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean. UNCCD and G20 Initiative are close partners of UNEP and UNCCD leads the Land Restoration Challenge under the UN Decade Action Plan. This challenge aims to achieve a target of Land Degradation Neutrality by 2030, ensuring that 30% land is under restoration by 2030 and 50% reduction in land degradation by 2040. These targets are based on the commitments given by the Members of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the new Target (2) in the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework (30% land under restoration by 2030) and the G20 Global Initiative on Reducing Land Restoration and Enhancing Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats (50% reduction in degraded land by 2040).

The draft resolution also relates to the "Framework and Guiding Principles for a Land Degradation Indicator to Monitor and Report on Progress Towards Target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Strategic Objectives of the Rio Conventions and Other Relevant Targets and Commitments", (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/20/INF/60) which directly addresses land degradation in the context of broader biodiversity and sustainability goals.

The International Resource Panel (IRP), a global scientific panel hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme, has produced reports on land degradation, such as the 2016 report "Unlocking the sustainable potential of land resources: evaluation systems, strategies and tools", and the 2019 report "Land Restoration for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals".

The draft resolution may benefit from further clarity on how the proposals align with UNEP's existing work in the areas of land degradation and drought, to ensure, as far as possible, complementary with the work of the UNCCD and other relevant existing agreements. It may also benefit from indicating specific mechanisms or platforms to be used to operationalize some of the proposed activities.

**iii) Budget implications:**

In order to build the institutional, technical and human capacity necessary for strengthening international efforts to halt land degradation, restore degraded lands and increase the resilience of ecosystems and communities to drought.

Taking into consideration the available existing resources, the overall extrabudgetary financial requirements for implementing this resolution during the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) period of 2022-2025 is estimated to USD 1,181,112.00. This amount provides for about USD 675,905.00 in staff positions and USD 505,207.00 in non-staff resources including activities covering travel, consultancies, operational costs, contractual services; etc. The table below provide the breakdown of estimated costs by budget group.

**Estimated resource requirements - summary**

Budget Category	Financial requirements	PSC rate @ 13%	Sub-total	Existing Resources	Net Requirement
Staff	739,270	96,105	835,375	159,470	675,905
Non staff	447,086	58,121	505,207	-	505,207
Total	1,186,356	154,226	1,340,582	159,470	1,181,112

a/Seed funding of \$300,000 required

*Secretariat focal points for draft resolution on Strengthening International Efforts to Halt Land Degradation, restore Degraded Lands and Increase Ecosystem and Communities Drought Resilience:*

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