



## DROUGHTS

November 2024

This note was prepared by CARI as part of the GTD and the PASS-LCD Project.<sup>1</sup> With a view to COP16, CARI offers its analysis of the consideration given to droughts within the UNCCD.

**The first part of the note** sets out how the subject has been considered within the Convention since its adoption in 1994.

**The second part of the note** explores the advances that will be expected at COP16, and proposes recommendations to contribute to the debates and negotiations on droughts.

### PART I: TAKING ACCOUNT OF DROUGHT WITHIN THE UNCCD

*This first part provides a definition and background based on a reading and analysis of the main publications of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD): initial text of the Convention, Framework Strategies, reports of the Conferences of the Parties.*

#### 1. Introduction

Since its adoption in June 1994, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has provided an international framework for "combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought in those countries experiencing serious drought, particularly in Africa".<sup>2</sup>

Drought is therefore one of the major issues addressed by the Convention, which recognised ahead of COP16 that this climatic phenomenon is "the most complex and serious of meteorological disasters, with devastating social, ecological and economic consequences"<sup>3</sup>. The UNCCD also states that "recent droughts have been on an unprecedented scale, with significant impacts on all sectors of society, including agriculture, energy, transport and health"<sup>4</sup>. In 2022, nearly 2 billion people will be affected by drought, 85% of whom live in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PASS-LCD: Structured action programme for actors in the fight against desertification (2023-2026) implemented by CARI, ENDA Pronat and ReSaD. Co-financed by AFD.

<sup>2</sup> [CNULCD](#), Article 2

<sup>3</sup> Note by the UNCCD Secretariat, 2024. Monitoring policy frameworks and thematic issues: drought [ICCD/COP\(16\)/15](#)

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought, 2024. [ICCD/COP\(16\)/20](#)

<sup>5</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Note by the Secretariat on the monitoring of policy frameworks and thematic issues: drought [ICCD/COP\(16\)/15](#) Based on data provided in 2022 in the reports of 101 States Parties to the UNCCD.

## 2. Arid zones, aridity, drought: what are we talking about?

**Arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas** are at the heart of the UNCCD's action. These are terrestrial areas of the planet where "the ratio of annual precipitation to potential evapotranspiration ranges from 0.05 to 0.65"<sup>6</sup>. These areas have a diversity of soils and adapted flora and fauna, which have enabled the development of a variety of human activities. Their common characteristic is **aridity**, defined by the IPCC in 2021 as "a state of a long-term climatic feature marked by a low level of average precipitation or available water in a given region"<sup>7</sup>.

→ The UNCCD's science-policy interface indicates that drylands are on the increase, and now account for 40.6% of the world's land area.<sup>8</sup>

**Drought** is defined by the UNCCD as "the natural phenomenon occurring when precipitation has been significantly below normal recorded levels and which results in serious hydrological imbalances detrimental to land resource production systems".<sup>9</sup>

→ This phenomenon is therefore not restricted to arid zones but can affect all areas of the planet.

*In short, drought is a climatic event that occurs over time, while aridity is a permanent climatic condition in regions considered to be arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid zones.*

## 3. Land degradation and drought: interconnected issues

In its founding text, the UNCCD indicates a correlation between desertification (i.e. land degradation in arid zones) and drought, and that these phenomena lead to major social problems such as poverty, food insecurity and migration.<sup>10</sup>

During its 2018-2019 biennium, the UNCCD's Science-Policy Interface (SPI) worked to further highlight the link between drought and land, with a view to strengthening interventions based on sustainable land management to mitigate the effects of drought and manage risks. The SPI report states that "there are strong links between drought and land [...] while healthy soils can store sufficient water to cope with periods of drought, soil degradation induced by [human activities] reduces the soil's capacity to retain water, exacerbates scarcity and increases vulnerability to drought."<sup>11</sup>

The SPI's work has highlighted the effectiveness of sustainable land management practices in mitigating the risks posed by unavoidable droughts and improving the resilience of populations and ecosystems. For example, the UNCCD proposes "sustainable land and water management, water recycling and reuse, shifting to drought-resistant crops and diversification of rural livelihoods"<sup>12</sup> as strategies to mitigate the risks of drought.

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<sup>6</sup> [CNULCD](#), Article 1

<sup>7</sup> IPCC, [Glossary of the Sixth Assessment Report](#)

<sup>8</sup> SPI 2024 report on changing aridity trends and future projections [ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/3](#)

<sup>9</sup> [CNULCD](#), Article 1

<sup>10</sup> [UNCCD](#), Preamble

<sup>11</sup> A. Reichhuber et al. 2019. Linking drought and land: enhancing the role of land management-based interventions to mitigate drought impacts and manage risks. [Report of the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface](#).

<sup>12</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Note by the Secretariat on the monitoring of policy frameworks and thematic issues: drought [ICCD/COP\(16\)/15](#)

## 4. The solutions promoted to date by the Convention to deal with drought

Since its adoption, the UNCCD has addressed drought-related issues, although efforts have been gradually stepped up over the last 3 decades. COP13 (Ordos, 2017) marked a turning point with, on the one hand, the adoption of a decision on drought-related policies<sup>13</sup> and, on the other, the inclusion in the 2018-2030 strategic framework of the UNCCD of a strategic objective aimed at "Mitigating, adapting to and managing the effects of drought, in order to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems."<sup>14</sup>

- ⇒ While most countries organise themselves in the face of drought with approaches focused on reacting to crises, the UNCCD promotes the implementation of proactive drought preparedness and adaptation measures that reduce the vulnerability and exposure of populations at all levels (national, regional and local).

Thus, the ambitions renewed in 2017 within the Convention are broken down into actions for:

- Providing policy guidance
- Supporting the development of national action plans to combat drought and regional programmes
- Organising knowledge sharing and capacity building on solutions for adapting to drought
- Mobilising financial resources

### 4.1. Policy guidelines

Following on from the decisions of COP13, the Convention has provided countries with **guidelines for developing resilience, adaptation and drought management policies**<sup>15</sup>. This framework proposes guidelines and courses of action based on three pillars:

- (1) Setting up drought monitoring and early warning systems
- (2) Drought vulnerability and risk assessment
- (3) Implementing measures to limit the impact of drought and respond more effectively to it

At COP14 (New Delhi, 2019), **an intergovernmental working group on drought**<sup>16</sup> was set up and renewed at the end of COP15 (Abidjan 2022)<sup>17</sup>. The mandate of this working group is to identify and evaluate global policy instruments that could be adopted to effectively manage drought within the framework of the Convention.

- ➔ The work of this working group has led to the identification of 7 possible options<sup>18</sup>, which will be examined at the COP and whose adoption will be negotiated (see next chapter).

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<sup>13</sup> [COP13 Decision 29](#) - Promotion of drought-related policies

<sup>14</sup> UNCCD, 2018. [UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018-2030](#)

<sup>15</sup> UNCCD, 2019. [Policy framework for resilience, adaptation and drought management: supporting technical guidelines.](#)

<sup>16</sup> [COP14 Decision 24](#) - Promotion of drought-related policies

<sup>17</sup> [COP15 Decision 23](#) - Promotion of drought-related policies

<sup>18</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Final report of the intergovernmental working group on drought - [ICCD/COP\(16\)/20](#)

## 4.2. Support for countries

At the request of countries, the UNCCD Global Mechanism provides support for the development and adoption of national action plans to deal with drought, as well as for the development of regional initiatives.

➔ To date, 34 countries have officially adopted an action plan to combat the drought.<sup>19</sup>

To encourage regional cooperation, the Global Mechanism is supporting the establishment of regional programmes to strengthen governance and drought management.

These programmes aim to support stakeholders at all levels by providing policy and management guidance and sharing scientific information, knowledge and best practices for integrated drought management. They also support the development and implementation of national drought plans.

## 4.3. Knowledge management

A "**Drought Toolbox**"<sup>20</sup> has been developed by the Convention and its partners (including the FAO, the Global Water Partnership and the World Meteorological Organization), providing tools, methods and data to support countries in analysing risks and different forms of vulnerability, and in prioritising interventions to mitigate the effects of drought.

**Communities of learning and practice** have been set up by the Secretariat in collaboration with the Global Water Partnership. The overall aim of these communities is to facilitate the adoption of an integrated approach to drought management, and also to contribute to achieving the Convention's mandate on reducing the environmental, social and economic impacts of droughts. According to a survey of countries carried out by the Convention, learning communities help to support the development of technical knowledge on drought. Countries would like the online platform to provide more information on tenders and funding opportunities related to drought management.<sup>21</sup>

**The UNCCD's Science-Policy Interface (SPI)** also works to develop science-based knowledge on drought-related topics. For example, the SPI has provided scientific data on approaches for assessing and monitoring the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems to the risks of drought<sup>22</sup> (2020-2021 work plan).

Then, with a view to COP16, the SPI worked on the evolution of aridity on a regional and global scale, and on forecasts of the risks associated with the expansion of arid zones and the increase in the number of people affected by drought<sup>23</sup> (2022-2024 work plan).

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<sup>19</sup> Directory of national action plans [online on the CNULCD website](#)

<sup>20</sup> Drought toolbox online on the CNULCD website: <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/drought/toolbox>

<sup>21</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Note by the Secretariat on the monitoring of policy frameworks and thematic issues: drought [ICCD/COP\(16\)/15](#)

<sup>22</sup> A. Reichhuber et al. 2022. Approaches to assessing and monitoring social and ecological resilience to drought. [Report of the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface.](#)

<sup>23</sup> UNCCD, 2024. SPI report on changing aridity trends and future projections [ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/3](#)

### **Publications expected at COP16**

The UNCCD secretariat is collaborating on a number of publications designed to inform decision-makers and guide their political choices. This work will be shared at COP16:

- **A global drought atlas** that identifies and presents a wide range of drought impacts and risk factors in five sectors of global importance: agriculture and livestock, water supply, hydropower, inland waterways and ecosystems. The atlas will include regional and local case studies highlighting lessons learned from previous droughts, as well as approaches and solutions for global drought risk management.
- **A publication on the economics of drought resilience** that sets out facts and scenarios demonstrating the economic case for sustainable land use practices. The report will include information on i) the real costs associated with drought in the case of inaction; ii) the costs and benefits of an effective preventive drought risk management policy based on iii) trajectories and best practices for improving land resilience to drought in highly affected regions.

#### **4.4. Financing**

The Global Mechanism is working on setting up a **mixed public-private fund for drought resilience**. The purpose of this funding is to :

- Support the strategic objectives concerning the reduction of drought risks with an integrated approach;
- Leveraging financial resources
- Mobilise investment to promote the implementation of "effective and sustainable" drought resilience measures.

This income-generating fund will invest in a range of projects related to drought resilience and/or in companies capable of making a significant positive contribution to drought resilience.<sup>24</sup>


## **5. The International Alliance for Drought Resilience**

The Secretariat and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD are also mandated to establish partnerships with relevant organisations to enhance the implementation of the Convention. For example, the UNCCD supports **the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA)**<sup>25</sup>, a coalition of countries set up in November 2022 at COP27 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by the heads of government of Senegal and Spain. The Alliance now includes 38 countries and more than 30 international organisations and is an important tool for promoting and supporting a preventive and risk-reduction approach to drought management. It supports and encourages action around Nature-based Solutions that promote resilience in the face of drought.

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<sup>24</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Note by the Secretariat on the monitoring of policy frameworks and thematic issues: drought [ICCD/COP\(16\)/15](#)

<sup>25</sup> International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA)



At COP28 of the UNFCCC, three joint publications by the UNCCD and IDRA were presented:

- The Global Drought Snapshot 2023 report<sup>26</sup>, which presents the multiple and cascading effects of drought, as well as a policy brief drawn from it.<sup>27</sup>
- The note on nature-based solutions for drought resilience<sup>28</sup>

***Launch of the International Drought Resilience Observatory at COP16***

This observatory is an initiative of the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA). It will take the form of a digital platform that will bring together/centralise data on droughts (their impacts and trends) and provide social and environmental indicators of drought resilience, with the aim of helping decision-makers to take decisions and implement appropriate policies. As a tool for decision-makers, the States will be able to enter their data.

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<sup>26</sup> IDRA, CNULCD, 2023. [Global Drought Snapshot](#)

<sup>27</sup> IDRA, CNULCD, 2023. [Policy Brief: The multiple and cascading effects of drought.](#)

<sup>28</sup> The Nature Conservancy, IDRA, CNULCD, 2023. [Technical guidance note on NfS for drought resilience.](#)

## PART TWO: PROGRESS EXPECTED AT COP16

*This section deciphers the envisaged content of the COP16 negotiations on action to tackle drought within the framework of the UNCCD. It explores the opportunities that will arise for agroecology to be given greater consideration in these negotiations.*

*This section is based on a reading and analysis of the draft COP16 decisions.<sup>29</sup>*

### 1. Follow-up to policy frameworks and thematic issues: drought

*Drought issues will be discussed on the afternoon of Monday 2 December<sup>30</sup> :*

- *At a ministerial round table on drought resilience*
- *At the plenary committee meeting on the follow-up to the drought policy framework.*

"The Parties to the Convention are aware of the growing need for targeted policies, effective collaboration and increased investment in drought preparedness, response and recovery measures in order to make a decisive impact on drought resilience".<sup>31</sup>

#### 1.1. At national level: Follow-up to the Drought Initiative

Following the Global Mechanism's efforts to support the adoption of national action plans to combat drought, the draft decision focuses on mobilising the resources needed to implement national action plans to combat drought.

- ➔ The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is called upon to support the Parties in implementing their national plans.
- ➔ The Global Mechanism must "step up measures" to help countries mobilise financing to implement their national plans, by encouraging gender issues and drought risk prevention strategies to be considered.
- ➔ The Global Mechanism must also work on mobilising other sources of financing, such as the Adaptation Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund, to encourage preventive drought management.

Another significant aspect concerning the implementation of these action plans is that the draft decision calls for the integration of gender issues, by supporting women and their initiatives in national plans to combat drought.

#### 1.2. At regional level

The draft decision asks the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to continue to promote "regional collaboration on policies and strategies to combat drought, as an effective means of supporting national action".

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<sup>29</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Draft decisions for consideration at COP16. [ICCD/COP\(16\)/22](#)

<sup>30</sup> UNCCD, 2024. COP16 Agenda [ICCD/COP\(16\)/1/Rev.1](#)

<sup>31</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Note by the Secretariat on the monitoring of policy frameworks and thematic issues: drought [ICCD/COP\(16\)/15](#)

### **1.3. At global level: the adoption of a global framework on drought**

In its report<sup>32</sup>, the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought (IGWG) identified 7 options for a global agreement on drought, which will be studied at COP16 and whose adoption or non-adoption will be negotiated between the States Parties. The proposed options are as follows:

- An amendment to the Convention
- A decision on collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF)
- COP guidelines for the Global Mechanism
- A global framework for drought resilience
- A political statement
- A protocol
- A special, ambitious COP decision on drought

Details of the 7 options proposed by the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought are presented in the appendix at the end of this note.

### **1.4. On knowledge sharing and capacity building**

The Convention secretariat should support the dissemination of lessons learned from the learning communities and communities of practice to enrich the policy-making process at regional, national and global levels, and in the other Rio Conventions, on the issue of droughts. The draft decision therefore asks the secretariat to:

- ➔ Continue to develop tools to monitor the impact of the drought
- ➔ And to set up communities of learning and practice with the aim of advancing "co-learning and supporting cooperation within and between regions in managing the risks of drought and its effects".

### **1.5. Financing the combat against drought**

The Convention recognises that: "*Innovative financing schemes such as insurance products, bonds and micro-credit are other instruments that play an essential role in long-term and sustainable mitigation*". (p.3)

The draft decision states that the Global Mechanism must work to:

- ➔ "Estimate the economic impact of judiciously redirecting harmful subsidies to promote virtuous practices that increase resilience in the face of drought.
- ➔ Evaluate the economic impact of using insurance products, bonds and microcredit services (i.e. financial services for the poor, including savings, credit and insurance services) [...]."

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<sup>32</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Final report of the intergovernmental working group on drought - [ICCD/COP\(16\)/20](#)



## 2. Mid-term review of the UNCCD strategic framework 2018-2030

*The results of the mid-term review of the UNCCD's 2018-2030 strategic framework will be discussed by the plenary committee on the afternoon of Friday 6 December.*

The results of the report by the intergovernmental working group<sup>33</sup> will be submitted to the various stakeholders at COP16. Drought appears to be a major concern for the Parties, and for many of them it should be the Convention's "priority".

Although the activities carried out by the Convention are considered positive and adapted to the needs and approaches of the countries, by the States Parties, certain problems persist in mitigating the effects of droughts and strengthening resilience:

- ➔ Lack of resources and capacity to set up drought monitoring and early warning systems;
- ➔ Lack of internal coordination and exchange of information between sectors and stakeholders.

The report establishes that "additional efforts" can be made to strengthen resilience to droughts. With this in mind, the draft decision resulting from the work of the CRIC22<sup>34</sup> calls on the Parties to:

- To set objectives worthy of the name and to develop, in a participatory manner, ambitious and integrated national policies and plans for the overall management of risks.
- Encourage a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach.
- Establishing links between drought and sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and the fight against climate change.

## 3. Possible plea to the COP on the issue of resilience in the face of drought

In the preparatory documents for COP16 and in some of the draft decisions, agroecology is cited as one of the "approaches and practices with high potential for combined environmental and socio-economic gains" that the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism must continue to promote. Through its environmental, societal and economic principles, agroecology represents a solution for improving the sustainability of agricultural systems. Agroecology could also be one of the solutions for making agro-systems more resilient by limiting their sensitivity to the impacts of drought.<sup>35</sup>

COP16 therefore represents an opportunity to promote the agroecological transition as a relevant solution for improving the resilience of populations and ecosystems to drought. CSOs can work to include proposals along these lines in their joint declarations at the sessions devoted to drought.

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<sup>33</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Report of the intergovernmental working group on the mid-term review of the strategy 2018-2030 [ICCD/COP\(16\)/2](#)

<sup>34</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Draft decisions for consideration by CRIC 22 - [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8](#)

<sup>35</sup> CARI, 2023. [Summary - Drought and agro-ecology](#)

## ANNEX: SUMMARY OF THE 7 OPTIONS FOR A GLOBAL FRAMEWORK PROPOSED BY THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL WORKING GROUP ON DROUGHT<sup>36</sup>

Option	Definition	Key strengths	Main weaknesses
An amendment to the Convention	Modification of the Convention, which is a legally binding agreement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revision of definitions</li> <li>- Addition of guiding principles</li> <li>- Reviewing the obligations of the Parties</li> </ul>	Legally binding: encourages Parties to honour their commitments  Improving access to resources for preventive and integrated drought risk management  Rekindle the interest of political leaders in these issues.	Difficulty gathering the support of the Parties  Lengthy adoption and ratification procedures  Binding only for Parties that ratify it
A decision on collaboration with the EGF	Increasing funding for drought resilience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Redefine the objective of the "DDT" intervention area, which focuses on the consequences of drought, to encourage more preventive drought management</li> <li>- Help countries to redirect environmentally damaging subsidies that contribute to drought towards activities that improve resilience</li> </ul>	Effectiveness of the EGF  Additional resources mobilised at no additional cost to beneficiary countries  Better involvement of and information for policy-makers on drought resilience	Difficulty in changing the GEF's programming guidelines  Risks linked to the availability of aid  First concrete results once the planned programmes are launched  GEF beneficiaries could choose to use their allocation without prioritising preventive drought management
COP guidelines for the Global Mechanism	GM action to strengthen Parties' capacity to access financing and implement their drought action plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technical expertise to countries</li> <li>- Generating knowledge on financing and economic spin-offs</li> </ul>	Countries better able to mobilise public and private funds to carry out transformative projects	Additional costs for MM work
A global framework for drought resilience	Definition of a global objective, targets and deadlines. Proposed measures to achieve this objective and monitoring and learning systems. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global strategic instrument that would guide the implementation of drought policies and initiatives (would provide precise guidelines in terms of integrated management)</li> </ul>	Encouraging countries to meet their commitments and begin the transition to preventive management  Complete solution: can integrate a multitude of elements	Time and resources needed to update national legislation  Complexity of defining precise targets  Major regional differences that need to be taken into account
A political statement	Formal declaration signed by high-level representatives (political commitment) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subsequently cited in subsequent resolutions</li> <li>- Draws attention to an issue and gives it visibility</li> </ul>	An effective way of generating attention for an issue and giving it visibility  A tool for raising public policy awareness	Non-binding / no control mechanism  Ephemeral visibility  Does not necessarily involve mobilising resources
A protocol	A legally binding instrument that would make it possible to put in place a broad and comprehensive legal approach to combating drought <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Imposes obligations on Parties that ratify it, relating to implementation, monitoring and resource mobilisation</li> </ul>	Negotiations that would attract political attention  Control mechanism  Creation of a legal basis to help develop policies  A comprehensive and coherent approach to combating drought  Tools for advocacy	Negotiations followed by lengthy ratifications  Additional costs for development and implementation  Lack of political will could derail negotiations  Additional workload for the Convention secretariat
A special, ambitious COP decision on drought	Resolution establishing a rapid and continuous process for implementing the Convention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support the work of the secretariat</li> </ul>	Quick and easy adoption  Promoting the implementation of the Convention without radical change  Enhancing technical and scientific elements	Non-binding / no control mechanism  Implementation of COP decisions may be incomplete  Unsecured resources

<sup>36</sup> UNCCD, 2024. Final report of the intergovernmental working group on drought - [ICCD/COP\(16\)/20](#)



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