

UNCCD and the COVID-19 crisis: land-based solutions for healthy people and a sustainable planet



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

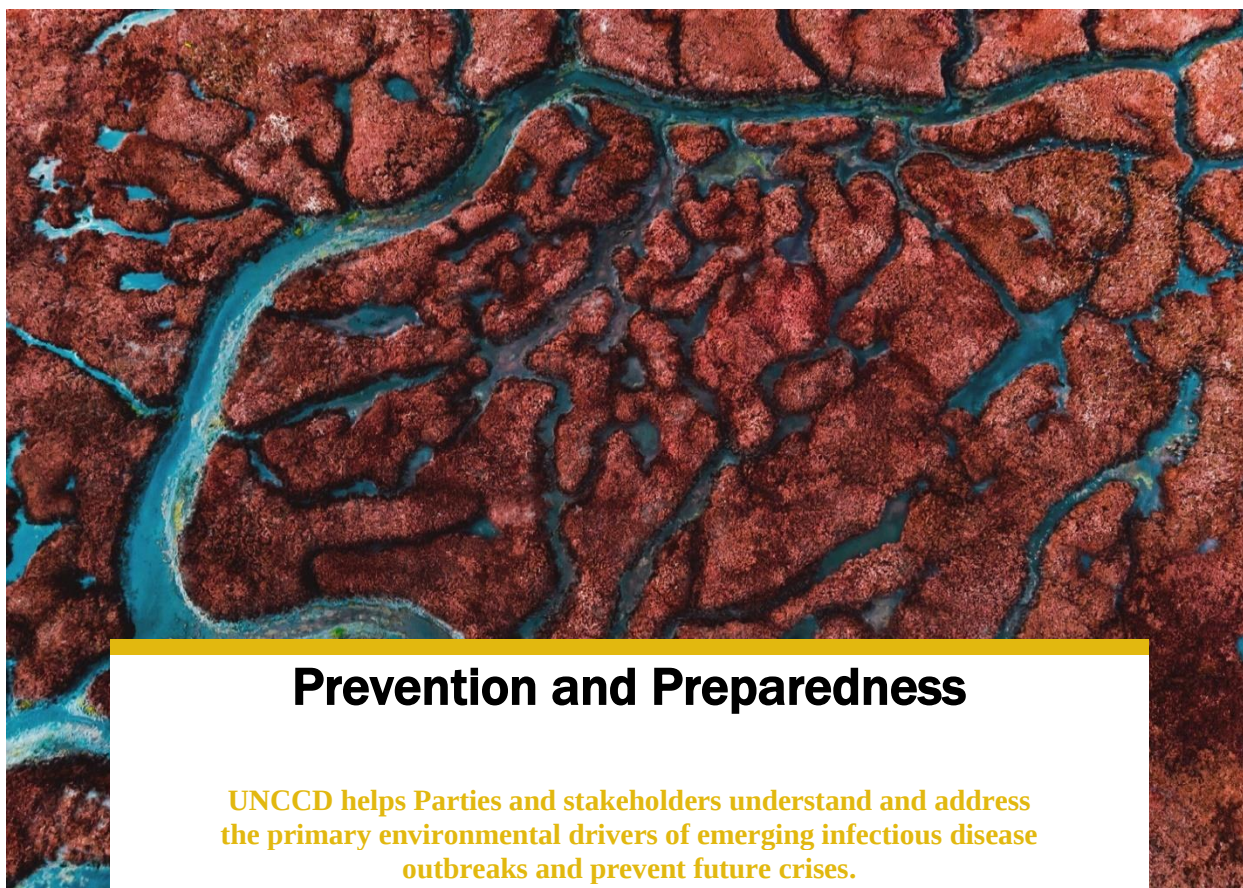
**United Nations Convention
to Combat Desertification
2020**

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The motto “*healthy land; healthy people*” is truer today than ever. In line with the global approach called for by the Secretary-General in his report entitled “Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity”, UNCCD stakeholders want to play their part to support Parties and communities to build back better, stronger, smarter as the COVID-19 pandemic eases.

With a clear understanding of the rights, rewards and responsibilities of land management, the Convention is a useful tool for Parties as they develop their response plans to the challenges that they now face.

Within the mandate given by Parties, the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism have reviewed and internally prioritized their 2020-2021 work programme to consider all stages of this COVID-19 crisis: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. An overview of the results that are planned to be achieved is presented below.



Prevention and Preparedness

UNCCD helps Parties and stakeholders understand and address the primary environmental drivers of emerging infectious disease outbreaks and prevent future crises.

Desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) are linked to the loss of animal habitat and the spread of diseases (including COVID-19) from animals to humans - known as zoonosis. The rate of future zoonotic disease emergence or re-emergence will be closely linked to the evolution of the relationship between humans and the environment, particularly the expansion of the agricultural frontier. In this biennium, collaborating closely with the Science-Policy Interface (SPI), the UNCCD secretariat will place a premium on communicating a science and evidence-based policy on the role of healthy land for people and on the potential of land restoration in preventing and preparing future pandemics.

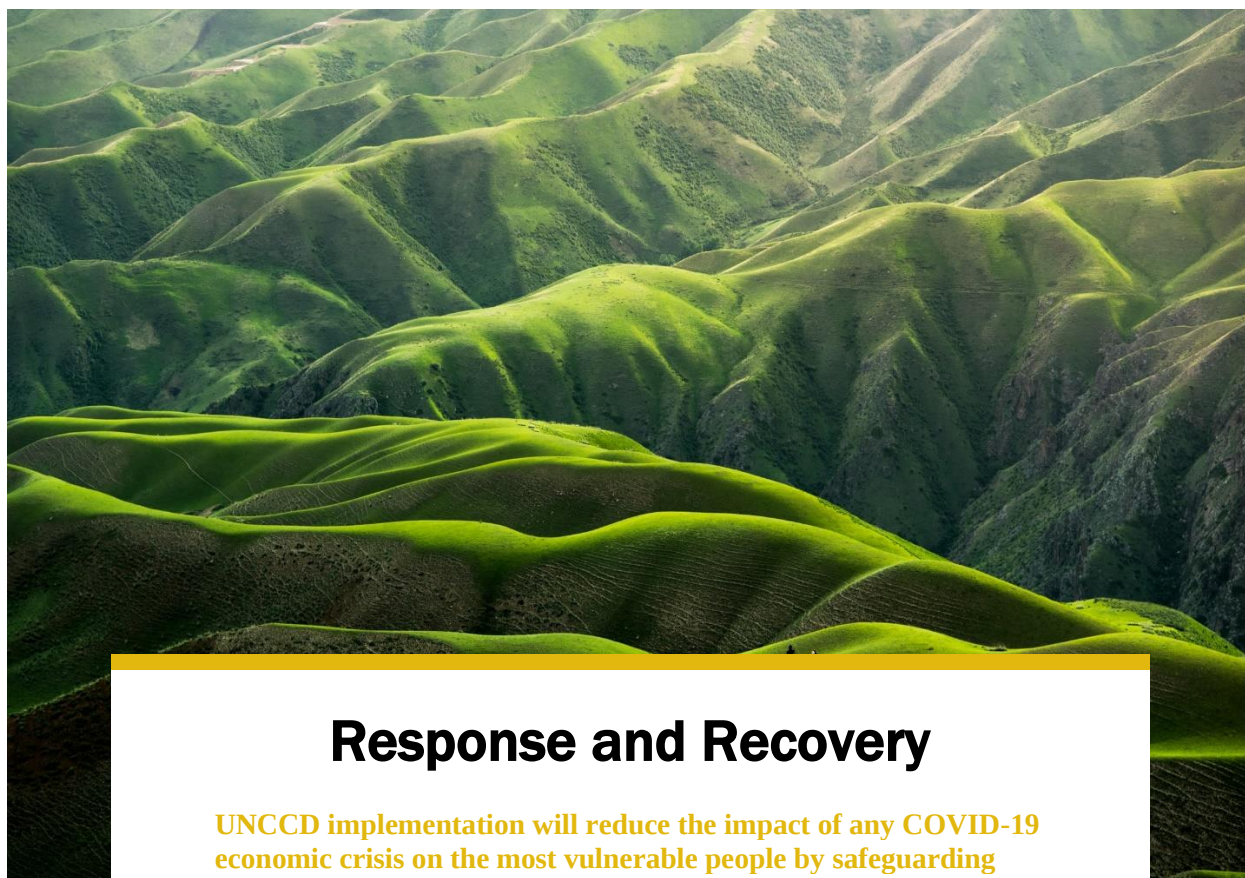
Sharing the knowledge, policies and practices developed under the UNCCD process will help Parties understand the risks of land degradation and capitalize on the continuum of avoided degradation, sustainable management and restoration of land. By harnessing the potential of good land management, we can help limit the future zoonotic disease burden. With the same interventions, UNCCD Parties are reducing the risk of other disasters such as sand and dust storms (SDS) or drought. A compendium of the state-of-the-art knowledge, policy and practice on SDS and toolboxes for use by parties to help prevent and prepare for drought and SDS will be made available.



UNCCD implementation strengthens the resilience of our communities and the natural systems we rely on to provide for our basic needs - food and water – as well as employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the difficulty of meeting even our basic needs, in some places, in this time of crisis. People everywhere have suffered from lockdowns and have been impacted by supply chain disruptions. The agricultural labour force is buckling under the strain. The vulnerability of both our human and natural systems is laid bare. Healthy land plays a critical role in the supply of food and water and is also the source of employment for millions of people around the world.

UNCCD underlines the importance of integrated land use planning that navigates trade-offs, takes account of the evolving urban-rural dynamic and encourages local, circular, production and consumption wherever possible. To further bolster the resilience of our basic food, water and employment systems, preparedness measures to reduce drought risk and vulnerability, gender-responsive land governance and an evolution of land use planning – to support Parties achieve land degradation neutrality (SDG15.3) and reduce risk – will continue as top priorities.



Response and Recovery

UNCCD implementation will reduce the impact of any COVID-19 economic crisis on the most vulnerable people by safeguarding livelihoods, re-establishing and creating new jobs, and mobilizing well-targeted investments.

We recognize that ecological and economic vulnerability caused by land degradation are amplified by the increasingly frequent occurrence of drought and sand and dust storms in many parts of the world. Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) responds by considering land holistically so that the right things can be done in the right places at the right scale. LDN continues to provide a solid, streamlined UNCCD-wide approach to addressing DLDD while respecting national specificities. It allows communities to feel safe and secure on healthy and productive land.

The UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism will prioritize support to country Parties in achieving their national LDN targets through the development of bankable gender-responsive Transformative Projects and Programmes (TPP). The circular and restoration economy, in the context of LDN, also offers an opportunity for UNCCD stakeholders to protect the land and at the same time create decent green jobs at a large scale. In the Sahel, COVID-19 is becoming a threat multiplier. Degraded lands are threatening food security, lowering economic prospects in rural areas and turning young people into economic migrants.



A specific response package for the Sahel, building on the “Creating lands of opportunity” project, the Great Green Wall (GGW) collaboration and other relevant UNCCD activities is being framed; while support for tackling the social implications of COVID-19 in rural areas, such as forced migration and conflict over natural resources, can be envisaged through the Initiative for Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S).

In parallel to this, the response and recovery from drought through the adoption of effective policy and implementation measures is being explored by an Intergovernmental Working Group, which will finalise its work by mid-2021. At the country level, the national drought plans supported through the Drought Initiative will soon be completed and ambitious drought and SDS related pilot projects will be implemented in Central Asia and Southern Africa. Rolling out an effective approach to drought, by all UNCCD Parties, will help secure the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable and at risk.

Effective action for LDN means access to resources and the most appropriate technology. In this biennium, the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism will continue striving to mobilize financial resources and secure access to effective and gender-responsive technologies. A model for technology transfer, to support Parties cooperation and interaction in this field is being developed.



Building Back Better

Recognizing that the future of human society, economic prosperity and nature are inter-dependent, UNCCD Parties can shape a social contract for nature.

Getting the economic and social recovery process right for the long term are part and parcel of a successful social contract for nature. And a compact with future generations.

The choices we make as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and as the economies open again, will lock in our development pathway for decades to come. Those choices will have the biggest impact if they harness the power of the private sector. The Global Mechanism will encourage the development of innovative investment vehicles and incentives that focus on restoring a lasting balance between people, prosperity and our planetary boundaries. This will give us the best shot at long term preparedness and resilience, especially for the poorest.

The UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism will make a specific effort to ensure the active involvement of civil society, notably women and young people, in the efforts to frame policy advice and communicate action

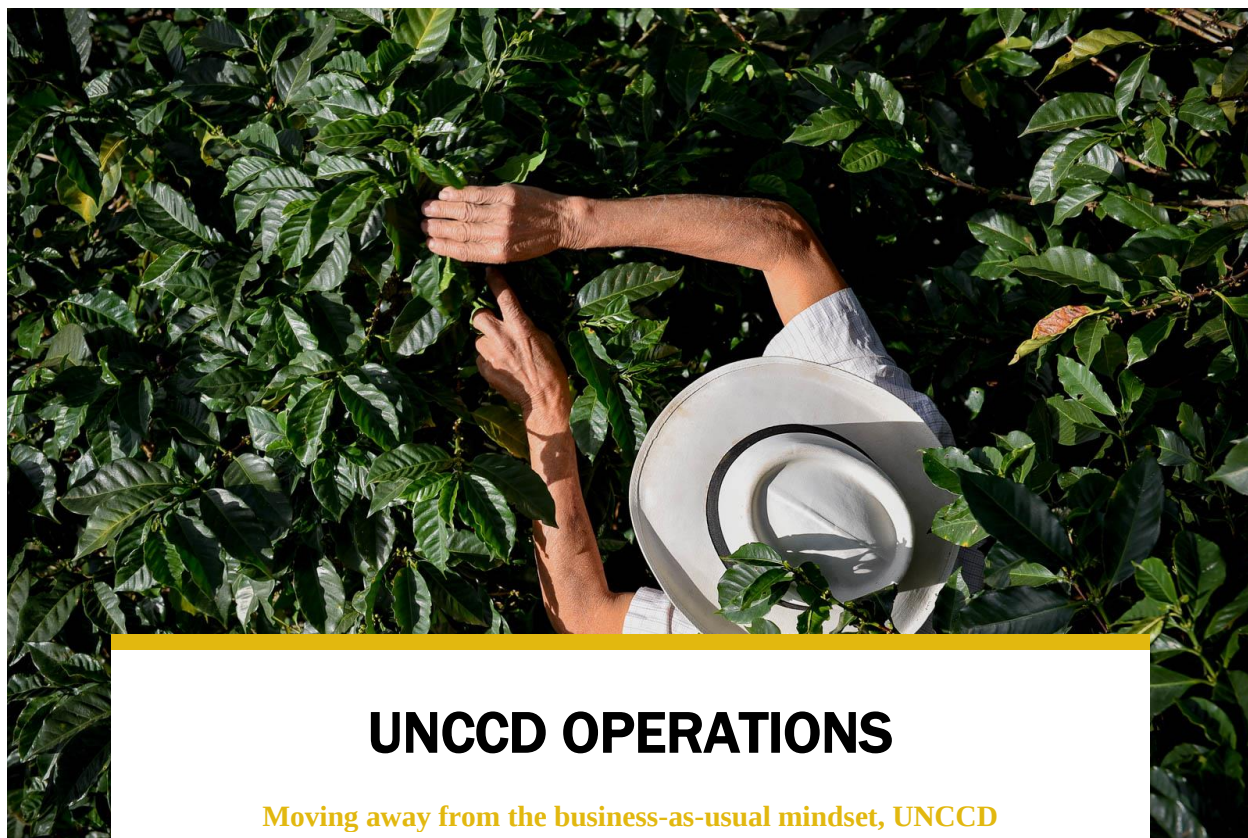


Collaboration and synergies with the other Rio Conventions will be reinforced to leverage the role of land and land restoration in the context of the post-2020 biodiversity framework and the nationally determined contributions for climate action.

The UNCCD flagship strategic communications tool, the Global Land Outlook 2, will offer a clear channel for delivering evidence-based analysis on the power of sustainable land management and land restoration to Parties and the general public. Several interim products and working papers are envisaged.

As we move forward, the UNCCD communications will reflect and respond to the changing conditions and the needs of Parties and other stakeholders. The website and the Knowledge Hub will be continuously developed to offer up-to-date, factual and relevant knowledge on land in the post-COVID19 context.

Securing reliable knowledge and data will be even more critical to the UNCCD Parties and their partners as they prepare the way ahead. The next round of reporting will underscore this, and the relevance of the Convention to future decision making. The national reporting guidelines and templates will be revised with further attention given to new realities, bottlenecks and success, such as gender and land rights.



UNCCD OPERATIONS

Moving away from the business-as-usual mindset, UNCCD Parties help establish policies, norms and actions that build back better, smarter and stronger

The COVID-19 is health crisis. It is also an economic and social crisis. The UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism will backstop the Convention process to make its response people-centred, prioritizing women, youth and the rural poor that often are the most vulnerable groups. The secretariat and the Global Mechanism remain faithful to their mandate but stress that at no time has our mandate been more important or relevant.

We aim to be helpful and nimble for Parties to this Convention, focusing on activities with the greatest impact. We will adapt when needed and innovate as a matter of course. As the potential of land-based solutions is yet to be fully harnessed, formal meetings of the Convention, in the run up to the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to be held during the second half of 2021, will offer an opportunity for our intergovernmental decision-making process to establish innovative policies, norms and practical actions that build back better, smarter and stronger in the post-COVID19 context.



As staff prepare to return to our offices in Bonn, the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism will look to take the best from new ways of working, including to create a safe and healthy environment. For example, if travel restrictions continue, alternative options for regional capacity building or even statutory meetings will be explored. The Convention entities will work with Parties to demonstrate, together, the case for land and to respond to the evolving needs.

The responsiveness and effectiveness of the adjusted work programme of the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism will be continuously monitored, with Parties guiding us and further adjusting and evolving the approach.

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