


Special Event

Youth Forum

Youth Action for Land: Working for Resilient and Sustainable Futures

 **05-07** DEC
2024 COP16 Blue zone
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

With the future of our land on the line. We are degrading 100 million hectares of healthy and productive lands each year. Our soils—which take up to hundreds of years to form—are being depleted in a matter of minutes. Droughts are hitting harder and more often, with women and girls affected first and worst. Three out of four people in the world are projected to face water scarcity by 2050. The proverbial well may soon run dry.

But, we have the power to bring land back to life. We can turn degradation into restoration. We can go from devastating droughts and floods to robust economies and resilient communities, and we can ensure that those who depend on land the most, have a say on how decisions are made. For this, we need to scale up ambition and investment. To deliver a moonshot moment for land, we need to restore 1.5 billion hectares of degraded lands by 2030 to have a collective agreement on how to tackle worsening droughts, to feed growing populations without converting more land or depleting our soils, and to deliver secure land rights for all in all parts of the world.

As one of the three major treaties known as the Rio Conventions— alongside climate change and biodiversity, the global voice for land, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the world's foremost platform where governments, businesses, and civil societies come together to discuss present-day challenges and chart a sustainable future for land.

We cannot stop the climate crisis today, biodiversity loss tomorrow, and land degradation the day after. We need to tackle all these issues together—and healthy land is at the heart of reaching global climate, nature, and sustainable development goals. This is what will be at stake at the UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in December 2024, coinciding with the Convention's 30th anniversary. COP16 will be a landmark event for accelerating action on land and drought resilience, and a gamechanger for the green transition in the world.

I. Introduction

Building on the recently launched **UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy (YES)** and recognizing the critical role of young people in addressing the challenges of land degradation and desertification, the **Global Youth Caucus on Land and Desertification (UNCCD Youth Caucus)** together with the UNCCD secretariat, the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, UNEP, UN Women, UNDP, AGFUND, ICESCO, IOM, ILO, Aeon collective, GIZ, LANDESA and Misk Foundation** are organising a three-day forum aiming to empower young leaders, facilitate knowledge exchange, and catalyze action towards restoring and protecting our lands for future generations and will serve as a platform for youth to exchange ideas, build skills, and mobilize action towards a sustainable future for our lands.

By empowering young leaders and fostering collaboration, we can make significant strides in addressing land degradation and desertification, contributing to global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNCCD objectives. As stewards of the future, young people play a key role in driving positive change and promoting sustainable land management practices.

II. Objectives:

- **Empower** youth to become advocates for sustainable land management while amplifying youth voices and perspectives to increase the visibility of youth, building upon YES, the outcomes of the Youth Voices towards UNCCD COP16, and the Youth Caucus Call to Action
- **Encourage** the different stakeholders to implement the YES and the activities identified to ensure the meaningful engagement of the youth
- **Foster** collaboration and networking among young leaders working on land-related issues
- **Provide** a platform for knowledge exchange and capacity building on effective land restoration and conservation strategies fostering education and capacity building, especially for youth, on DLDD
- **Generate** innovative solutions and actionable recommendations to address land degradation and desertification
- **Provide** recommendations to the Parties to ensure the stronger, effective and meaningful participation of youth in meetings and process of the convention
- **Promote** solutions and provide opportunities to young people particularly in the creation and establishment of green, decent and land-based jobs for youth.

III. Main Outcome of the Youth Forum:

- Joint Youth Statement to be presented to and adopted by the parties during COP16

The youth conference will be closed on the occasion of **People's Day on 7th December** with the organization of a 2 hours high level event with the participation of the COP President, the Minister of Human Resources and Social of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, high rank government officials and youth representatives to present the outcomes of the conference and commitments for ensuring the meaningful engagement of the youth.