



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification



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ULAANBAATAR

Ulaanbaatar Declaration on Local and Regional Governments

Local Leadership for Land Resilience: Advancing Implementation across the Rio Conventions

Adopted at the UNCCD COP17 Mayors' Forum
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
21 August 2026

We, the mayors, governors and other authorities of local and regional governments participating in the UNCCD COP17 Mayors' Forum in Ulaanbaatar,

Recognizing that land degradation, desertification, drought, biodiversity loss, water insecurity and climate change are closely interconnected challenges that increasingly affect the sustainable development, resilience, prosperity and well-being of cities, territories and communities;

Recognizing the benefits of stronger and more equitable urban-rural linkages, including sustainable land use and planning, improved infrastructure for the delivery of critical services (public transport, health, education, etc.) and better management of land and natural resources;

Recognizing that local and regional governments are indispensable partners in achieving the objectives of the Rio conventions (UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD) and that their proximity to communities, territorial responsibilities, their mandate to provide public services, and capacity to implement integrated solutions make them critical actors in translating global commitments into concrete actions on the ground;

Recalling the outcomes of the UNCCD COP16 Mayors' Forum in Riyadh, including the Declaration and Call for Engagement, and reaffirming the shared commitment to further strengthen the contribution of local and regional governments to the implementation of the Convention through continued exchanges and collaboration;

Recognizing that localization is essential to achieving the objectives of the Rio conventions, through integrated implementation, effective multilevel governance and cooperation among all levels of government and relevant stakeholders, to strengthen coherence and synergies across the global agendas on land, biodiversity, climate, and water.

Adopt the following declaration.

We call on local and regional governments, Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism and all relevant partners to:

1. Advance integrated local action for land restoration and resilient territorial development

Promote integrated localization approaches that address land degradation, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, water scarcity and sustainable urban development in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Recognize urban, peri-urban and rural areas as interconnected territories and strengthen urban-rural linkages that support nature-based solutions, ecosystem restoration, sustainable food systems, resilient livelihoods and inclusive economic opportunities.

Advance compact, inclusive and resource-efficient urban development that prevents forced rural out-migration and unmanaged sprawl, reduces unnecessary land consumption and safeguards productive agricultural land, water resources and natural ecosystems.

Strengthen effective multilevel governance and collaboration in the design, implementation and monitoring of national strategies, action plans and commitments related to land restoration, climate action, biodiversity conservation and drought resilience, aligning global and national commitments with local priorities and action.

2. Strengthen the role of local and regional governments within the UNCCD process

Building on the COP16 Call for Engagement and the Riyadh Process, institutionalize structured, regular and meaningful participation of local and regional governments within the UNCCD process, both between and during sessions of the Conference of the Parties.

Explore the establishment of an engagement mechanism for local and regional governments within the Convention, drawing on successful experiences from other multilateral environmental agreements.

Ensure the regular convening of a Local and Regional Governments or Mayors' Forum as part of future UNCCD COPs, connected to the formal deliberations and outcomes of the Convention.

Encourage Parties to include representatives of local and regional governments in national delegations, consultations and implementation processes related to the Convention.

Recognize the contribution of local and regional governments to achieving the objectives of the UNCCD and the Sustainable Development Goals and promote the integration of local achievements into national reporting and review processes.

Recognize the outcomes of the COP17 Mayors Forum as an official contribution to the UNCCD COP17 process.

3. Strengthen coherence and synergies across the Rio conventions and the water agenda, contributing to advancing the 2030 Agenda

Promote integrated implementation of the UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD through coordinated action at the territorial level, strengthening synergies with the water agenda and advancing the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, while recognizing the important role of flow-based governance approaches to make URLs more sustainable and resilient.

Align land-use, housing, transport, water, biodiversity and climate policies to guide urban and territorial development toward Land Degradation Neutrality, climate resilience and nature-positive outcomes.

Recognize loss and damage as a shared territorial consequence of land degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change, drought and water insecurity, affecting livelihoods, public services, ecosystems, cultural heritage and community well-being.

Encourage collaboration among Parties, Convention Secretariats and local and regional governments to improve coherence across COP17, the biodiversity and climate COPs, and the 2026 UN Water Conference, recognizing their contribution to achieving the 2030 Agenda, including through engagement in the Road to Abu Dhabi and the Road to the 2027 SDG Summit processes, led by the Local2030 Coalition, to advance localization as a critical pathway for shaping global agendas and translating commitments into transformative action and impact.

4. Support implementation through partnerships and finance

Expand cooperation among governments, international organizations, development banks, financial institutions, academia, civil society, water and sanitation utilities and the private sector to support locally led implementation.

Facilitate direct, simplified, predictable and long-term access to finance and capacity development for local and regional governments for nature-based solutions, land and ecosystem restoration, drought resilience, and sustainable infrastructure, promoting approaches that channel finance towards local impact and transform systems to address interconnected challenges.

Strengthen support for project preparation, technical assistance and investment pipelines that enable local governments to access climate, biodiversity and land-related funding mechanisms.

5. Promote knowledge, innovation and cooperation

Support partnerships, scientific cooperation, knowledge exchange, peer learning and decentralized cooperation among local and regional governments.

Advance the deployment of nature-based solutions, innovative technologies and integrated planning tools that strengthen land restoration, water security and climate resilience.

Encourage the dissemination of practical guidance and lessons learned on urban-rural linkages, peri-urban governance, sustainable land management and territorial planning.

Improve access to technical expertise, capacity-building programmes, data and decision-support tools needed to accelerate local implementation.

6. Strengthen land governance, tenure security and territorial food systems

Advance inclusive, transparent and accountable land governance systems that promote sustainable land management and equitable development.

Strengthen land tenure security, particularly in peri-urban and rapidly urbanizing areas, as a foundation for long-term investment, ecosystem stewardship and social stability.

Promote sustainable territorial food systems that connect urban, peri-urban and rural areas, protect productive land and ecosystems, and strengthen food and water security.

Support local and regional governments in integrating food systems into land-use planning, climate adaptation, biodiversity strategies and drought preparedness.

Address land-use conflicts, informal expansion and land speculation through integrated planning approaches that balance environmental protection, economic development and social inclusion.

7. Build resilience to drought and water stress

Integrate drought preparedness, risk reduction and water security into local and regional planning and investment processes.

Promote watershed management, ecosystem restoration, groundwater recharge, water-sensitive urban planning and other nature-based solutions that strengthen resilience to drought and water scarcity.

Support local and regional governments in responding to the needs of people being internally displaced or forced to migrate due to the expansion of deserts and drought.

Support local clean water provision systems, including through the public ownership, management, and democratic governance of water services.

Support local drought monitoring, early warning systems and risk-informed decision-making to reduce vulnerability and enhance preparedness.

We commit ourselves to:

Advancing local action to prevent and reverse land degradation, restore ecosystems, strengthen drought resilience and contribute to biodiversity conservation, climate resilience and sustainable development.

Promoting compact and sustainable urbanization, stronger urban-rural linkages and integrated territorial development that reduce pressures and harmful impacts on livelihoods, land, water and natural ecosystems.

Advancing inclusive land governance and tenure security to strengthen stewardship of land and natural resources and support resilient communities.

Scaling up nature-based solutions and ecosystem restoration initiatives that generate environmental, social and economic benefits.

Strengthening cooperation among cities and regions through partnerships, peer learning and the exchange of practical experience including on sustainable land and water management, and resilient territorial development.

Promoting inclusive approaches that engage communities, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples and other stakeholders in locally led action.

Strengthening local monitoring systems, data collection and evidence-based decision-making to track progress on land restoration, drought resilience and sustainable territorial development.

Integrating the objectives of the Rio conventions into local development plans, climate strategies, biodiversity action plans and land-use planning frameworks.

Consolidating the Riyadh Process as the platform for structured dialogue and engagement between the UNCCD, its Parties and the organized constituency of local and regional governments.

Looking Ahead

We welcome 2026 as the year in which the Conferences of the Parties to the three Rio conventions are convened in sequence, followed by the UN Water Conference, providing an important opportunity to strengthen coherence and synergies across the global agendas on land, biodiversity, climate and water, and to advance locally led perspectives and solutions across these interconnected agendas.

From Ulaanbaatar, we send a clear message to Parties gathering at COP17 and across the Rio conventions: achieving the global goals on land restoration, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience

and water security requires local and regional governments not only as implementers of commitments, but as recognized partners in shaping them.

We therefore call for a new era of multilevel environmental governance in which local and regional governments are systematically engaged in the design, financing, implementation and monitoring of global commitments, bringing the realities of communities and territories into the heart of international decision-making.

Through the Riyadh Process and the Ulaanbaatar Declaration, we commit to advancing a common agenda for resilient territories, healthy ecosystems and sustainable urbanization, ensuring that local action accelerates progress towards Land Degradation Neutrality and the objectives of all three Rio conventions, while contributing to the 2030 Agenda and helping to build momentum towards the 2027 SDG Summit.

