



## COP16 of UNCCD

**For Prelims:** [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification](#), [Great Green Wall \(GGW\) Initiative](#), Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils, [Sacred Lands, Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought \(DLDD\)](#), [Rio Conventions](#), [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#), [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), [Planetary Boundaries](#), [Greenhouse Gas](#), [Carbon Reserves](#), [Aral Desert](#), [Sahel](#), [Sahara](#), [Wetland](#)

**For Mains:** Rising threat of desertification and ways to address them.

[Source: TH](#)

### Why in News?

Recently, the 16<sup>th</sup> **Conference of the Parties (COP16)** to the [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#) concluded in **Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**, with nearly 200 countries committing to prioritise land restoration and drought resilience.

- It was also the **first time** a UNCCD COP was held in the [Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\) region](#).

### What Were the Key Outcomes of COP16 UNCCD?

- **Global Drought Framework:** Nations advanced efforts toward a global drought framework, aiming for **completion at COP17 in Mongolia 2026**.
- **Financial Pledges:** Over **USD 12 billion** pledged to address desertification, land degradation, and drought.
  - **Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership:** **USD 12.15 billion** committed to supporting **80 vulnerable countries**, including USD 10 billion from the Arab Coordination Group.
  - **Great Green Wall (GGW) Initiative:** The African-led [GGW initiative](#) secured **Euros 11 million from Italy** for Sahel landscape restoration and **Euros 3.6 million from Austria** to enhance coordination across 22 African countries.
  - **Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS):** Nearly **USD 70 million** announced for VACS initiative.
    - VACS aims to build **resilient food systems** with diverse, nutritious, and climate-adapted crops in healthy soils.
- **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities:** Caucuses for [Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities](#) were formed to ensure their perspectives and challenges are represented.
  - The [Sacred Lands Declaration](#), presented at the **Indigenous Peoples Forum**, greater involvement in global land and drought governance.
- **Business4Land initiative:** It highlights the role of **private sector advocacy**, [environmental, social, and governance \(ESG\) strategies](#), and sustainable finance in tackling [Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought \(DLDD\)](#) challenges.

- The private sector currently contributes **only 6%** of financing towards land restoration and drought resilience.
- **UNCCD's Science-Policy Interface (SPI):** Parties agreed to continue the **UNCCD's SPI**, established at **COP11 (Windhoek, Namibia) in 2013** to translate scientific findings into recommendations for decision-makers.

## United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

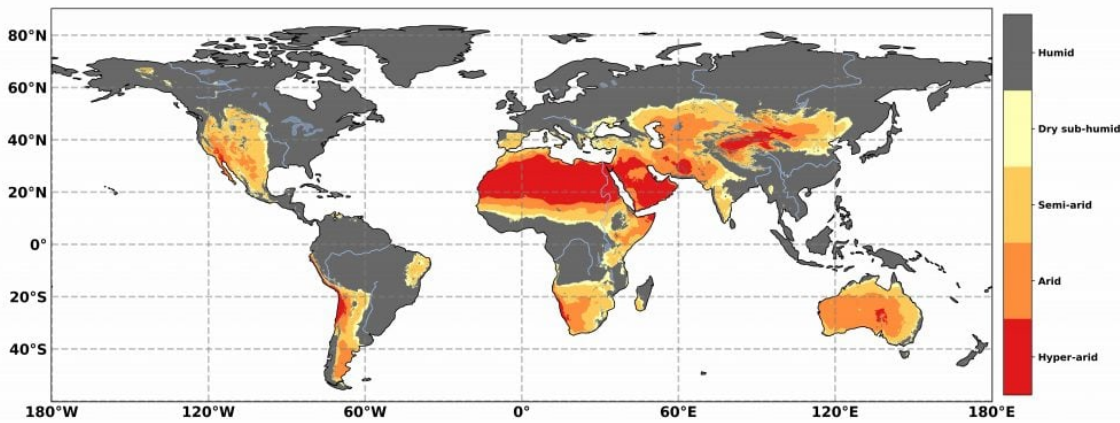
- **About:** The UNCCD is one of the three **Rio Conventions**, along with the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** and the **Convention on Biological Diversity**.
- **Purpose and Importance:** The UNCCD was established in **1994** to protect and restore land, aiming for a sustainable future.
  - It addresses the consequences of **land degradation and drought**, including crop failure, migration, and conflict.
- **Objective:** Its main goal is to **mitigate land degradation and protect land** to ensure access to food, water, shelter, and economic opportunities for all people.
- **Legally Binding Framework:** It is the **only legally binding international agreement** to combat desertification and drought.
- **Membership:** The Convention has **197 Parties**, including 196 countries and the European Union.
- **Principles:** It operates on the principles of **participation, partnership, and decentralization**.

## International Drought Resilience Observatory

- The **International Drought Resilience Observatory (IDRO)** is the **first global AI-driven platform** to help countries assess, and enhance, their capacity to cope with harsher droughts.
- This innovative tool is an initiative of the **International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA)**.
  - IDRA is a global coalition that helps mobilize **political, technical and financial capital** to enhance drought resilience in **countries, cities, and communities**.
  - It was launched by the **27th Conference of Parties (COP27)** to the **UNFCCC** at **Sharm El-Sheikh** by **Spain and Senegal**.

## What is Desertification and its Current Status?

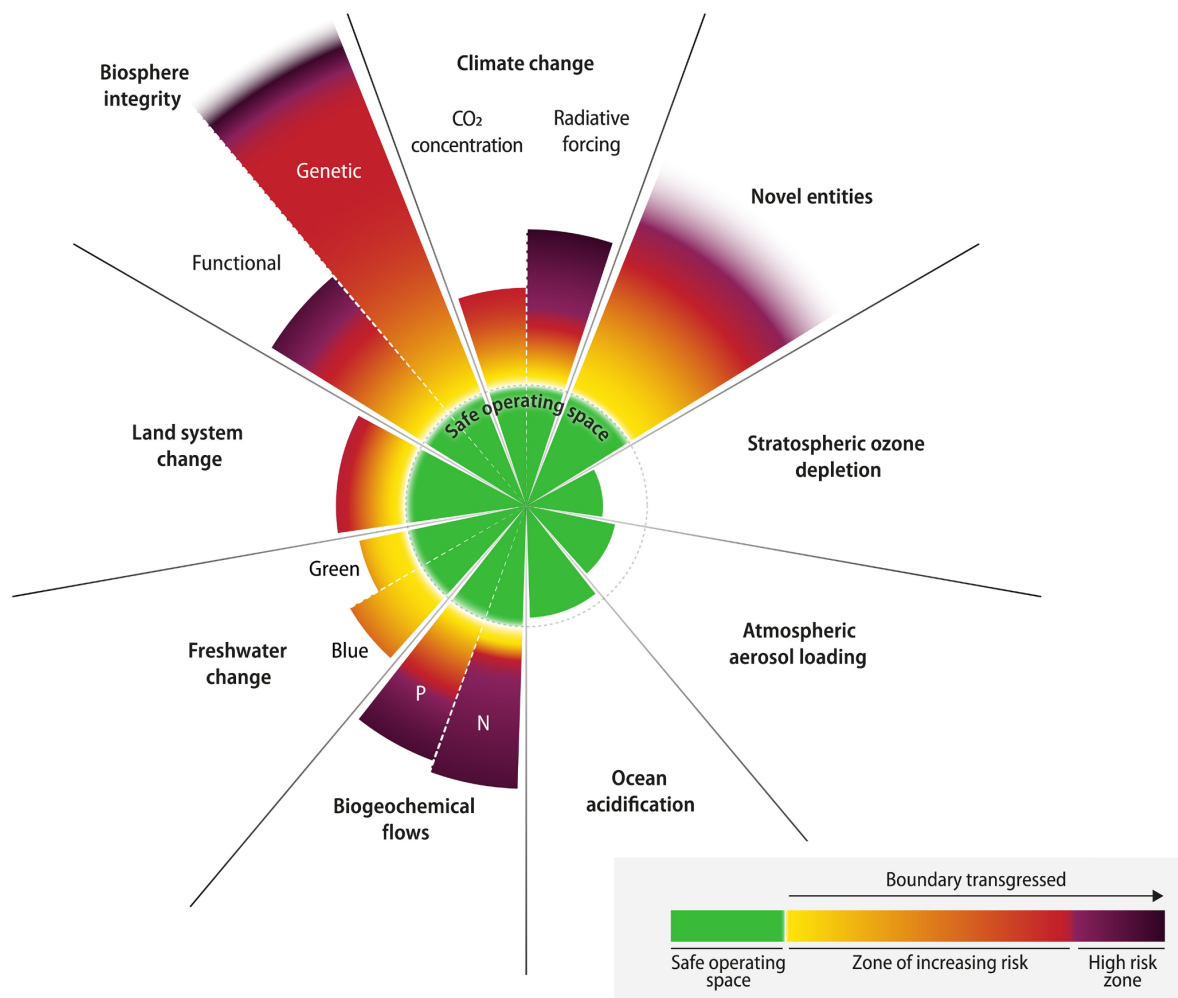
- **Desertification:** Desertification is a type of **land degradation** in which an already **relatively dry land area becomes increasingly arid**, degrading productive soil and losing its bodies of water, biodiversity and vegetation cover.
  - It is driven by a combination of factors, including **climate change, deforestation, overgrazing and unsustainable agricultural practices**.
- **Current Status:**
  - **Expansion of Drylands:** According to the UNCCD report ***The Global Threat of Drying Lands, 77.6% of Earth's land*** has experienced drier conditions since the 1990s.
    - Drylands now make up **40.6% of Earth's terrestrial surface** (excluding Antarctica), showcasing a rapid loss of productive land.
  - **Key Regions Affected:** **Europe** (95.9% of its land), parts o **Brazil**, the **Western United States, Asia, and Central Africa** are witnessing significant drying trends.
    - **Africa** and parts of **Asia** are seeing ecosystem degradation and desertification, threatening biodiversity.
  - **Projected Future Impact:** Projections indicate that, in a worst-case scenario, up to **5 billion people** could live in drylands by the century's end, facing challenges like **depleted soils, water scarcity, and ecosystem collapse**.



## What are the Implications of Land Degradation and Desertification?

- **Planetary Boundaries at Risk:** Seven of nine [planetary boundaries](#) have been negatively impacted due to unsustainable land use, as highlighted in the **UNCCD Stepping back from the precipice report**.
  - **Agriculture** is responsible for **23% of [global greenhouse gas emissions](#), 80% of deforestation**, and 70% of worldwide freshwater usage.
- **Economic Cost:** Droughts impact **1.8 billion people globally** and the economic toll of droughts is estimated at **USD 300 billion annually**, severely affecting agriculture, energy, and water availability.
- **Social Cost:** **Water scarcity** and **agricultural collapse** are driving **forced migration** across regions, including the **Middle East, Africa, and South Asia**, creating social and political challenges.
- **Food Security:** Land degradation threatens **one-sixth of the global food supply**, potentially **depleting one-third of the Earth's [carbon reserves](#)**.
- **Link to Natural Disasters:** Aridity is driving larger, more **frequent wildfires**, particularly in semi-arid regions, by increasing dry biomass.
  - **Sand and dust storms** are becoming more common, particularly in the **Middle East**.

**Note:** The nine planetary boundaries are:



## Current Status of Desertification in India

- According to **UNCCD data**, from **2015-2019**, **30.51 million hectares** of India's total reported land was degraded.
  - This means that **9.45%** of the country's landmass was **degraded** as of 2019. This was **4.42% in 2015**.
- India's total degraded land is equivalent to the size of **43 million football pitches**.
- **251.71 million Indians** constituting 18.39% of the country's population were exposed to **land degradation** during the same period.
- **854.4 million** of the country's people were exposed to **drought from 2015-2018**.

## Way Forward

- **Reforestation and Afforestation:**
  - **Reforestation:** **Uzbekistan's** greening program has planted **trees and shrubs** on one million hectares of the **Aral desert**, using drought-resistant **black saxual shrubs (*Haloxylon Aphyllum*)** to stabilize soil and prevent sandstorms.
  - **Afforestation:** The "**Great Green Wall**" aims to restore **100 million hectares of land by 2030**, involving 22 African countries in the **Sahel** and **Sahara** regions.
- **Agroforestry:** Integrating trees with agricultural crops can improve **soil fertility, conserve water, and reduce soil erosion**.
- **Water Management Techniques:** **Rainwater harvesting** and **drip irrigation** can efficiently deliver water to plant roots, minimizing evaporation and runoff in water-scarce regions.
  - Planting **drought-resistant crops** ensures agriculture continues in water-scarce regions,

supporting food security.

- **Habitat Restoration:** Protecting and rehabilitating natural habitats, like **wetlands and riverbeds**, restores biodiversity, improves **soil moisture**, and boosts ecosystem resilience against desertification.
- **Addressing Root Causes:** Addressing desertification drivers like **deforestation, poor land management, and climate change** is crucial, along with policies that promote sustainability.

**Drishti Mains Question:**

Q. What is Desertification? What are the key strategies that can be adopted to mitigate land degradation in arid regions?

**UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

**Prelims**

**Q. What is/are the importance/importances of the 'United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification? (2016)**

1. It aims to promote effective action through innovative national programmes and supportive international partnerships.
2. It has a special/particular focus on South Asia and North Africa regions, and its Secretariat facilitates the allocation of major portion of financial resources to these regions.
3. It is committed to bottom-up approach, encouraging the participation of local people in combating the desertification.

**Select the correct answer using the code given below:**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Ans: (c)**

**Q. Consider the following international agreements: (2014)**

1. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
2. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
3. The World Heritage Convention

**Which of the above has/have a bearing on biodiversity?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Ans: (d)**



## **Mains**

**Q.** The process of desertification does not have climate boundaries. Justify with examples. (2020)

**Q.** Define the concept of carrying capacity of an ecosystem as relevant to an environment. Explain how understanding this concept is vital while planning for sustainable development of a region. (2019)

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