

UN Women

Expert Group Meeting

‘Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes’

11 – 14 October 2021

**Enhancing women’s vital contributions in the fight against land degradation,
desertification and drought**

Informational paper prepared by:

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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) Priority Theme:
Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes

Expert Group Meeting – 11th 12th October

UNCCD Informational Paper

1. From 11th – 14th October 2021, UNWomen will convene an Expert Group Meeting on the 66th Commission on the Status of Women priority theme: “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.” The objective of the EGM is to take stock of current research and practice and to assist the Commission in its deliberations. The 66th CSW will take place in March 2022.
2. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. It is one of the three Rio Conventions. The Convention’s 197 Parties work together to improve the living conditions of men and women affected by land degradation, desertification and drought (LDDD), to maintain and restore land and soil productivity, and to mitigate the effects of drought. The UNCCD is particularly committed to a bottom-up approach, encouraging the participation of local people in combatting desertification and land degradation.
3. According to a new WMO report¹, flood-related disasters have risen by 134% (since 2000) compared with the two previous decades and the number and duration of droughts also increased by 29% over the same period. While most drought-related deaths occurred in Africa, most the flood-related deaths and economic losses were recorded in Asia. In 2021, drought and fires were reported in Algeria, Russia, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, among other countries. The impacts of drought affect millions of people and many sectors and domains – such as agricultural production, public water supply, energy production, waterborne transportation, tourism, human health and biodiversity – contributing to food insecurity, poverty and inequality².
4. Productive land and forest areas continue to decline, mainly due to agricultural expansion. Between 2015 and 2020, an estimated 10 million hectares of forests were destroyed each year, affecting approximately 3.2 billion people across the globe, driving species into extinction and intensifying climate change³. Climate change is also intensifying the water cycle, bringing more torrential rainfall and floods, as well as more severe drought, in many regions⁴. Rising temperatures caused by climate change disrupt rainfall patterns, thus increasing the frequency, severity and duration of droughts worldwide⁵. When the land is healthy, it provides natural storage for fresh water. When it is degraded, it can no longer absorb water, and its filtration capacity is therefore lost.

¹ WMO, 2021 State of Climate Services – Water, 2021 https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10815

² Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, [Special Report on Drought 2021](#), June 2021

³ UNCCD, Global Land Outlook 2, Working Paper on Gender, September 2021

⁴ IPCC Sixth Assessment, Working Group I report, Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis, July 2021

⁵ Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, [Special Report on Drought 2021](#), June 2021

5. Adding to the complexity, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly threatened gains previously made in the fight against poverty. Data from the World Bank indicates that in 2020, between 71 to 100 million people have been pushed into poverty as a result of the crisis, with the majority of the newly extreme poor found in South Asian and Sub-Saharan countries, where poverty rates were already high⁶. Measures taken during the pandemic have exacerbated the vulnerability and poverty of women and men engaged in the informal or agricultural economy. Women domestic workers have lost revenue. In India, migrant workers were forced to return to their villages with no income and no social protection. As primary caregivers, women have also taken on the burden of unusually high levels of both paid and unpaid care, putting them at higher risk of contracting the virus, falling into poverty or suffering from mental health illnesses.
6. The pandemic has also increased food prices and food insecurity. According to the UNWomen Gender Snapshot report, the gender gap in food insecurity has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's food insecurity levels were 10% higher than men's in 2020, compared with 6% higher in 2019. Land degradation is a major factor that contributes to food insecurity and higher food prices. Deforestation and land degradation make it difficult to meet the growing demand for energy, water, fiber, medicines and food⁷.
7. Due to their high dependence on agriculture and their responsibility for household food and water provision, women are particularly affected by the negative impacts of land degradation. Recent studies indicate that women's reliance on agriculture, fisheries and forests for subsistence or employment in many contexts – and their primary responsibility for household food, water and fuel provision – means that land degradation, deforestation, water scarcity and pollution substantially increase their paid and unpaid workloads and exacerbate their risks of poverty and hunger, against which they typically have fewer resources to buffer the impacts⁸.
8. **To reverse degradation, land restoration is critical.** The year 2021 initiates the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Land restoration covers a wide range of activities and interventions that improve environmental conditions by avoiding, minimizing, and reversing land and ecosystem degradation⁹. Land restoration projects historically tend to exclude women from the conservation and management of forests. With less access to knowledge, information and resources, women may also be prevented from accessing financing, services, and natural and productive resources. Yet, the effectiveness of restoration is enhanced by the integration of appropriate human aspects and indigenous and local knowledge and practices¹⁰.
9. Land restoration will be essential to achieve the objectives of SDG 15. Recognizing women's rights to land and increasing their access to natural resources, as well as to knowledge and financing, is critical. The UNCCD Parties have committed to mainstreaming gender into land restoration initiatives, as well as supporting gender transformative projects. Countries are taking steps toward recognizing women's equal rights in their laws and frameworks. As an example, women's customary land rights have now been recognized under law in Ghana, Mozambique, and Uganda. But more needs to be done.

⁶ World Bank, Projected Poverty Impacts of COVID19, June 2020

⁷ UNCCD, Global Land Outlook 2, Working Paper on Gender, September 2021

⁸ UN Women, A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice, 2021

⁹ UNCCD, Global Land Outlook 2, Working Paper on Gender, September 2021

¹⁰ UNCCD, Global Land Outlook 2, Working Paper on Gender, September 2021

10. The Gender Action Plan adopted by the Parties constitutes a framework to make the Convention's implementation more gender-responsive. The Parties have identified four priorities for action: Participation in decisions taken during the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to implement the UNCCD; Integrating women's economic empowerment in UNCCD implementation activities in order to eradicate their extreme poverty; Strengthening women's land rights and access to resources; Enhancing women's access to improved knowledge and technologies related to effective UNCCD implementation.
11. Furthermore, at the last UNCCD Conference of Parties, a landmark decision on land tenure was adopted. Decision 26/COP14 invites Parties to legally recognize equal use and ownership rights of land for women and the enhancement of women's equal access to land and land tenure security, as well as the promotion of gender-sensitive measures to combat desertification/land degradation and drought and achieve land degradation neutrality, taking into account the national contexts.
12. Other Conference of Parties decisions¹¹ include key actions to advance gender equality in the implementation of the Convention, such as:
 - a. Create enabling environments at the national level to make the implementation of the Convention gender-responsive and transformative
 - b. Continue collaboration and partnership building with the other Rio Conventions, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, other United Nations entities, international organizations and other relevant organizations to explore further ways of strengthening awareness-raising, improving the Gender Action Plan and developing further tools and guidelines for the use of Parties in the thematic areas of the Gender Action Plan and the gender-responsive implementation of the Convention;
 - c. Strengthen stakeholders' knowledge and capacity
 - d. Promote collaboration between desertification/ land degradation and drought specialists and experts on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls
 - e. Remove structural barriers to women's equality, secure land use and tenure rights, and inheritance in accordance with the national context
 - f. Promote women's leadership and women and girls' full and equal participation in land restoration projects and initiatives.
13. The upcoming Conference of Parties in May 2022 in Cote d'Ivoire will be an opportunity to assess progress and to share relevant knowledge and policy guidance.

¹¹ Decision 24/COP14 – Follow up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Gender