



WWF EXPECTATIONS FOR UNCCD COP17

ADVANCING INTEGRATED ACTION FOR LAND, NATURE, CLIMATE AND PEOPLE



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WWF UNCCD COP17 EXPECTATIONS OVERVIEW

1. Increase alignment of land, biodiversity and climate agendas with a focus on nature-positive food and agriculture systems
2. Take ambitious action to protect, sustainably manage and restore grasslands, savannahs and rangelands
3. Support pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
4. Advance the Land-Water Nexus for Resilience and Sustainable Development
5. Position Landscape Restoration and Soil health as an essential component to achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and delivery mechanisms across the Rio Conventions

INTRODUCTION

Desertification, land degradation and drought directly affect food security, water availability, livelihoods and economic resilience. They are also deeply interconnected with the global crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. As the first Conference of the Parties in this year's Rio Convention cycle, preceding CBD COP17 and UNFCCC COP31, UNCCD COP17 represents a critical opportunity to demonstrate how integrated action across land, biodiversity and climate agendas can accelerate implementation and deliver greater impact.

Convened during the [International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists](#), UNCCD COP17 should place particular emphasis on the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of grasslands, savannahs and rangelands, ecosystems that are being degraded and converted at almost four times the rate of forests. COP17 should also recognize the essential contribution of pastoralism and rangeland stewardship to climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, food security, social stability and peace.

WWF calls on Parties to use COP17 to strengthen action through both the formal negotiation tracks and the Mongolia COP Presidency initiatives being advanced under the Mongolian Presidency [Steppe Action Agenda](#), including efforts on rangelands, water-land nexus, resilience and integrated Rio Convention implementation.

1. INCREASE ALIGNMENT OF LAND, BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE AGENDAS WITH A FOCUS ON NATURE-POSITIVE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS

Parties should:

- Place nature-positive and resilient agri-food systems at the centre of Rio Convention implementation by aligning climate, biodiversity, land restoration and food security priorities across government ministries.
- Strengthen cross-ministerial coordination through joint planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting frameworks that support integrated delivery of LDNs, NDCs, NAPs and NBSAPs.
- Scale farmer- and community-centred landscape approaches that integrate food production, conservation and restoration while enhancing resilience and livelihoods.
- Redirect public and private finance towards agroecological and nature-positive agriculture by reforming harmful incentives and rewarding ecosystem stewardship.
- Develop interoperable food systems data and monitoring platforms that improve policy coherence, reduce reporting burdens and strengthen accountability across the Rio Conventions.

Land degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change and water insecurity are interconnected challenges that cannot be addressed effectively through fragmented approaches. COP17 presents an important opportunity to operationalize synergies across the Rio Conventions and accelerate delivery of global commitments.

WWF welcomes the growing emphasis on Rio Convention cooperation, including the work of the [Rio Conventions Joint Liaison Group](#), the [Riyadh Action Agenda](#), and the [UNCCD COP 17 Draft decision](#) on integrated implementation. The COP17 negotiations should translate these commitments into practical mechanisms that improve coordination, reduce duplication and strengthen delivery at national and landscape levels.

Nature-positive and resilient food and agricultural systems provide one of the most effective pathways for achieving multiple environmental, social and economic objectives simultaneously. Parties should use nature-positive food system approaches to align implementation of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets under the UNCCD, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) under the UNFCCC, and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) plus National Biodiversity Finance Plans, under the CBD.

Implementation should focus on landscapes where agricultural production, biodiversity conservation, water management and land restoration converge. Achieving this will require stronger cross-ministerial coordination, integrated planning processes, and aligned financing and reporting systems.

COP17's formal decisions on Rio Convention synergies should encourage countries to align national targets and implementation frameworks, strengthen cooperation between Rio Convention focal points, promote integrated approaches such as nature-based solutions and sustainable food systems, and improve collaboration on science, monitoring and finance.

2. TAKE AMBITIOUS ACTION TO PROTECT, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE AND RESTORE GRASSLANDS, SAVANNAHS AND RANGELANDS

Parties should:

- Commit to halting the conversion and degradation of natural grasslands, savannahs and rangelands and integrate their protection into national land-use planning and Rio Convention implementation frameworks and connect to CBD Target 2 and Target 3.
- Scale up transboundary landscape conservation and restore ecological connectivity to protect migratory wildlife and prevent the fragmentation of native grasslands from linear infrastructure development, building on successful landscape initiatives.
- Scale investment in the restoration and sustainable management of degraded grasslands and rangelands, with a strong focus on soil health, water stewardship, biodiversity recovery and climate resilience.

- **Strengthen recognition and support for pastoralism and sustainable grazing systems as essential tools for conserving biodiversity, maintaining ecosystem functions and sustaining rural livelihoods.**

Natural grasslands, savannahs and rangelands are among the world's most important yet overlooked ecosystems. They support biodiversity, store significant amounts of carbon above and below ground, sustain food production and livelihoods, regulate water cycles, and underpin the well-being of more than 500 million pastoralists worldwide. Yet these ecosystems continue to experience alarming rates of degradation and conversion.

WWF expects COP17 to elevate grasslands within both the formal UNCCD process and the Mongolian Presidency initiatives, including the [Steppe Action Agenda](#), [the Rangeland Flagship Initiative](#) and the [Coalition of Rangeland States](#).

Parties should integrate commitments to sustainable grassland management in national implementation plans and strategies (LDNs, NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs) and move from silos to synergies by better linking climate, biodiversity, food systems and land governance. Management measures to be scaled include implementing soil and water conservation and supporting working landscapes and agroecological grazing to maintain biodiversity, connectivity and ecosystem services. Grasslands must be recognized as key carbon stores, and strategies to protect native grasslands and soil organic carbon from afforestation, agricultural or other land use change must be developed. With 50 per cent of rangelands degraded, restoration of rangelands needs to be centred around soil health and soil fertility, with urgent action needed to strengthen soil information systems. Finance must be mobilized and economic incentives adapted to support grassland conservation and pastoralist stewardship.

WWF welcomes the progress achieved under the UNCCD COP16 decision on rangelands and pastoralism and encourages Parties at COP17 to build on this foundation through stronger implementation commitments, enhanced monitoring, and increased political and financial support for sustainable rangeland management. As discussions advance on a potential new COP17 decision, Parties should use this opportunity to move from recognition to action by strengthening national implementation of rangeland and pastoralism commitments, improving data and reporting systems, supporting pastoralist livelihoods and mobility, and mobilizing finance for restoration and sustainable management. Any new decision should reinforce the role of rangelands in achieving Land Degradation Neutrality, biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation and mitigation, water security and sustainable food systems, while creating clear linkages with the Mongolian Presidency initiatives, including the [Steppe Action Agenda](#), [the Rangeland Flagship Initiative](#) and the [Coalition of Rangeland States](#).

3. SUPPORT PASTORALISTS, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Parties should:

- **Recognize pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples, faith actors, local communities and farmers as essential stewards of healthy rangelands, catchments, aquifers and productive landscapes.**
- **Empower herder communities through community-centred landscape approaches and incentive mechanisms that reward ecosystem stewardship, strengthen human-wildlife coexistence and support knowledge exchange and capacity development for sustainable rangeland management.**
- **Secure land and resource rights, support pastoral mobility, and strengthen inclusive governance systems that enable local stewardship of land, water and nature.**
- **Ensure equitable access to finance, capacity-building and technical assistance, particularly for women, youth and Indigenous, faith and local community organizations.**
- **Fully integrate farmers and pastoralists into Land Degradation Neutrality implementation, monitoring and reporting processes.**

Pastoralism is a cornerstone of sustainable rangeland management. Pastoral mobility is not a driver of degradation but a highly effective adaptation strategy that enables communities to respond to climatic variability and ecological constraints while maintaining healthy ecosystems.

WWF expects COP17 to strengthen recognition of pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (including transhumant groups, ranching communities and spiritual and religious communities) as key partners in addressing desertification, land degradation and drought.

Successful land restoration and sustainable land management depend on secure tenure rights, equitable governance, valuing local traditional and spiritual knowledge and beliefs, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. COP17 should reinforce commitments to inclusive and rights-based approaches, ensuring that those who manage landscapes are empowered to shape their future.

Parties should facilitate the active engagement of pastoral communities in the stewardship, management, conservation and restoration of grasslands through participatory planning, multi-stakeholder and bottom-up approaches, including multi-sector mechanisms led by Indigenous peoples and local communities. Parties must continue integrating land tenure considerations into their plans and activities to combat desertification, land degradation and drought, to empower pastoral communities and incentivize the adoption of long-term sustainable land and water management. It is necessary to support women and youth, noting their changing roles, including leadership, in pastoral governance, and to ensure that Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists and local communities have equitable access to financial incentives.

4. ADVANCE THE LAND-WATER NEXUS FOR RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Parties should:

- **Integrate water security, watershed restoration and freshwater ecosystem conservation into national LDN strategies and related Rio Convention implementation plans, plus the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.**
- **Prioritize restoration and protection of river basins, wetlands, groundwater recharge zones and other critical water-producing and storing landscapes.**
- **Promote integrated land and water planning that strengthens drought resilience, climate adaptation, biodiversity outcomes and sustainable food production. The Freshwater Challenge is a global initiative that integrates implementation across the Rio Conventions and Ramsar.**
- **Mobilize increased investment for nature-based solutions that deliver benefits for both land restoration and freshwater security, including the targeted protection of critical runoff-forming areas and vulnerable riverscapes through integrated land-use planning.**

Water security and land health are inseparable. Land degradation undermines hydrological processes, reduces water availability, accelerates drought impacts and increases vulnerability to climate change. Conversely, healthy landscapes and freshwater ecosystems support water regulation, groundwater recharge, climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods.

WWF welcomes the Mongolian Presidency's emphasis on the Land-Water Nexus and expects COP17 to strengthen recognition of the critical role that freshwater ecosystems play in achieving Land Degradation Neutrality and broader Rio Convention objectives.

Parties should adopt integrated approaches that link land restoration, watershed management and freshwater ecosystem conservation, particularly in regions facing increasing water stress and drought risks.

5. POSITION LANDSCAPE RESTORATION AND SOIL HEALTH AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT TO ACHIEVING LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY (LDN) AND DELIVERY MECHANISMS ACROSS THE RIO CONVENTIONS

Parties should:

- **Elevate soil health and landscape restoration as a core indicator and investment priority for Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), by committing to integrate measurable soil health targets and indicators into national LDN implementation, restoration strategies, and food system**

policies, while increasing public and private investment in nature-positive, regenerative and agroecological production practices.

- **Scale landscape restoration as a pathway to nature-positive and climate-resilient food systems by accelerating large-scale, farmer-centred landscape restoration through aligning policies, finance, and implementation across the Rio Conventions, ensuring restoration efforts deliver simultaneous benefits for land restoration, biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation and mitigation, water security, livelihoods, and food security.**

Restoring degraded landscapes and improving soil health is one of the most effective and scalable solutions for reversing land degradation and delivering on UNCCD commitments. By transforming degraded lands into productive, resilient ecosystems, restoration enhances biodiversity, strengthens livelihoods, improves food and water security, and increases resilience to climate change. Achieving global Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets will not be possible without significantly accelerating restoration efforts at scale.

Restoration is an Investment in Food Security, Healthy soils and resilient landscapes are the foundation of agricultural productivity and nature positive food systems. Restoration improves soil health, fertility, water retention, and nutrient cycling, while increasing resilience to drought and other climate shocks, helping secure food production for future generations.

Restoration strengthens Climate Resilience as restored soils and landscapes increase carbon storage, reduce the impacts of droughts, floods, wildfires, and extreme weather. Restoration is also one of the most cost-effective nature-based solutions for adapting to climate change. Restoration benefits biodiversity and People. Restoring degraded ecosystems reconnects habitats, supports wildlife recovery, improves ecosystem services, and strengthens local economies through jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and enhanced community resilience. Healthy soils underpin these outcomes by supporting biodiversity both above and below ground.

Improving soil health through regenerative and agroecological approaches can simultaneously support restoration, climate resilience, water security, biodiversity conservation and sustainable agricultural productivity.

CONCLUSION

UNCCD COP17 must demonstrate that addressing desertification, land degradation and drought is central to achieving global goals for climate, biodiversity, food security and sustainable development. By advancing Rio Convention synergies, scaling action for grasslands and rangelands, supporting pastoralist and Indigenous communities, strengthening the land-water nexus, and prioritizing soil health, Parties can accelerate progress toward Land Degradation Neutrality while delivering lasting benefits for people and nature.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Martina Fleckenstein

Global Head of Food & Agriculture Policy

WWF

mfleckenstein@wwfint.org

Leonie Meier

Global Grasslands and Savannas Lead

WWF

leonie.meier@wwf.de



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WWF, 28 rue Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 364 9111

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