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Discussion Paper

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TOWARDS A SHARED FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATING DESERTIFICATION

Purpose

Land is fundamental to human well-being. It sustains food production, regulates water, stores carbon, supports biodiversity and provides the ecological foundation for livelihoods, cultures and economic development. Protecting these functions is central to achieving the objectives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Over the past three decades, scientific knowledge on desertification, land degradation and drought has expanded considerably. Countries have adopted national strategies, monitoring systems have improved and practical experience has demonstrated that land degradation can be prevented, reduced and reversed through sustainable land management and ecosystem restoration. The concept of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) has further strengthened the Convention by providing a common framework for balancing ongoing land degradation with measures that restore and improve land resources.

Despite these advances, desertification remains one of the least understood global environmental challenges. Unlike floods, wildfires or storms, land degradation usually develops gradually. Changes in soil health, vegetation, biodiversity and ecosystem functioning often become visible only after years of cumulative decline. As a result, desertification rarely generates the public attention or political urgency associated with sudden

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environmental crises, even though its consequences affect food security, water availability, climate resilience, rural livelihoods and economic stability. This gap is not primarily one of scientific knowledge, it is also a question of communication.

The implementation of the UNCCD depends on the ability of governments, researchers, practitioners, civil society, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, youth and the private sector to build a shared understanding of why healthy land matters, why degradation must be prevented and how restoration contributes to sustainable development. Communication is therefore not simply an instrument for raising awareness, it is an enabling component of implementation, supporting informed decision-making, participation, cooperation and long-term commitment.

This discussion paper has been prepared as a contribution to the COP17 side event *From an Invisible Crisis to Collective Action: Communicating about Desertification and Mobilising Solutions.*, jointly organised by the French Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD), DesertNet International (DNI), Nucleo di Ricerca sulla Desertificazione (NRD) and La Route du Sel et de l'Espoir. Its purpose is to stimulate dialogue on how communication can better support the objectives of the Convention, strengthen public and political engagement and encourage collective action towards Land Degradation Neutrality.

This discussion paper has been prepared to support the UNCCD COP17 side event: "From an invisible crisis to collective action: communicating about desertification and mobilising solutions", jointly organised by the French Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD), DesertNet International (DNI), Nucleo di Ricerca sulla Desertificazione (NRD) and La Route du Sel et de l'Espoir.

Our aim is not to propose a definitive communication strategy, rather to identify a number of principles for discussion. These are intended to support future collaboration among Parties and stakeholders and to explore whether a shared framework for communicating desertification could strengthen the implementation of the UNCCD across different regions and contexts.

Communication as an enabler of UNCCD implementation

The UNCCD recognises that combating desertification, land degradation and drought requires more than technical solutions. Sustainable land management depends on informed decisions, inclusive governance and the active participation of the people who manage, use and depend on land. *Communication plays a strategic role in translating scientific knowledge into practical action and in connecting global commitments with local realities.*

Since its adoption, the Convention has promoted an integrated approach to land management based on scientific evidence, cooperation among institutions and the participation of affected populations. These principles remain central to the implementation of the Convention and to the achievement of Land Degradation Neutrality¹. They also provide a foundation for a more effective approach to communication.

A first challenge lies in the nature of desertification itself. Land degradation is often difficult to perceive because it develops progressively. Soil fertility may decline over decades, vegetation may become less diverse, water retention may decrease and ecosystem services may weaken without producing dramatic visual changes. By the time degradation becomes evident, opportunities for prevention are often more limited and restoration becomes more costly².

This gradual progression influences how societies perceive risk. Environmental issues that produce immediate impacts generally receive greater media attention and stronger political responses. Desertification, by contrast, is frequently regarded as a distant or localised problem affecting only drylands, despite its implications for food systems, biodiversity, climate adaptation, migration and economic resilience. *Communication has an essential role in making these processes visible before their consequences become irreversible.*

The challenge is therefore not simply to explain environmental change: communication must demonstrate why land matters to society as a whole. Healthy land supports agricultural productivity, water security, biodiversity conservation, climate regulation and the livelihoods of millions of people.

These benefits are rarely considered together, yet they underpin many national priorities, including economic development, poverty reduction and resilience to climate change³.

Viewing communication as an enabling component of implementation also changes its purpose. Far from being limited to disseminating information once decisions have been taken, communication contributes throughout the policy cycle by supporting dialogue, encouraging participation, strengthening ownership and facilitating cooperation among institutions and stakeholders. *Effective communication allows scientific evidence to inform policy while ensuring that policies also benefit from the experience and knowledge of those who manage landscapes on a daily basis.*

This perspective reflects one of the defining characteristics of the UNCCD: the recognition that sustainable land management depends on partnerships. Governments establish policy frameworks, but implementation also relies on farmers, pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples, local authorities, researchers, educators, civil society organisations, businesses and young people. Each contributes different forms of knowledge and different capacities for action. Communication provides the means through which these perspectives can be shared, compared and integrated⁴.

The Convention also emphasises the importance of the Science–Policy Interface. Advances in Earth observation, land monitoring and ecosystem assessment have greatly improved the understanding of degradation processes and restoration opportunities. Scientific evidence is indispensable for identifying priorities, measuring progress and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions^{5/6}. Yet, evidence alone rarely leads to policy change or behavioural change. It must be communicated in forms that are relevant to different audiences and connected to the decisions they are expected to make.

For policymakers, communication may need to demonstrate the economic and social benefits of investing in land restoration. For local authorities, it may highlight practical approaches to integrated landscape management. For land users, it should address the direct implications of management choices for productivity, resilience and livelihoods. For young people, communication can connect land restoration with innovation, education and opportunities for participation. *The objective is not to simplify scientific knowledge, but to make it accessible and meaningful without compromising its integrity.*

¹Verborg, P.H., Metternicht, G., Allen, C., Debonne, N., Akhtar-Schuster, M., Inácio da Cunha, M., Karim, Z., Pilon, A., Raja, O., Sánchez Santivañez, M. and Senyaz, A. (2019). Creating an Enabling Environment for Land Degradation Neutrality and its Potential Contribution to Enhancing Well-being, Livelihoods and the Environment. A Report of the Science–Policy Interface. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Bonn, Germany.

²Bonnet, B., Chotte, J.L., Hiernaux, P., Ickowicz, A. and Loireau, M. (2024). *Désertification et changement climatique, un même combat?* (p. 128). éditions Quae.

³Maestre, F.T., Guirado, E., Armenteras, D., Beck, H.E., AlShalan, M.S., Al-Saud, N.T., Chami, R., Fu, B., Gichenje, H., Huber-Sannwald, E. and Speranza, C.I. (2025). Bending the curve of land degradation to achieve global environmental goals. *Nature*, 644(8076), pp.347–355.

⁴Tremblay-Lévesque, L.C., Tsegai, D., Warner, J., Hoogesteger, J., Diallo, B.L. and Majercakova, G. (2026). Assessing UNCCD's role in advancing social learning for combating desertification, land degradation, and drought. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 177, p.104330.

⁵Velander, S., Wagner, N. and Biber-Freudenberger, L. (2026). Chapter 14: Science–Policy Interfaces and Sustainable Development: Institutionally Bridging the Knowledge–Action Gap. In *Rethinking Sustainability: Principles and Practice* (pp. 469–503). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

⁶Neuenkamp, L., García de León, D., Hamer, U., Hölzel, N., McGale, E. and Hannula, S.E. (2024). Comprehensive tools for ecological restoration of soils foster sustainable use and resilience of agricultural land. *Communications Biology*, 7(1), p.1577.

Participation is equally central to effective communication. The Convention has consistently recognised that communities affected by land degradation are not just beneficiaries of policies but also essential partners in designing and implementing solutions⁷. Local and Indigenous knowledge, developed through long-term interaction with landscapes, complements scientific research and often provides practical insights into sustainable land management, adaptation and restoration⁸.

Communication should, therefore, create opportunities for dialogue rather than relying exclusively on one-way transmission of information.

A communication approach consistent with the principles of the UNCCD must also recognise the interdependence of environmental and development agendas. Land degradation is closely linked to climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, food insecurity and rural development. Presenting desertification as an isolated environmental issue understates its significance. Communicating these connections helps decision-makers and the wider public understand that investments in healthy land generate multiple benefits across sectors and contribute to several international commitments simultaneously.

The implementation of the Convention increasingly depends on the ability to build broad public support for sustainable land management. Scientific evidence, effective policies and financial resources remain indispensable, but they are unlikely to achieve their full impact without a shared understanding of why land matters and why restoration represents an investment in environmental sustainability, economic resilience and social well-being⁹.

Under this perspective, communication should be regarded not as a supporting activity but as a strategic component of implementation. It enables the Convention's principles to reach beyond institutional processes, strengthening cooperation among stakeholders and creating the conditions for collective action towards Land Degradation Neutrality¹⁰.

Towards a Shared Framework for Communicating Desertification

Communication has become an essential dimension of environmental governance. It shapes how problems are understood, how evidence informs decisions and how societies engage with long-term change. For the UNCCD, communication has become a means of strengthening implementation by fostering participation, supporting the Science-Policy Interface and encouraging coordinated action across sectors and levels of governance.

Desertification presents a particular communication challenge because its causes, impacts and solutions are often perceived through different lenses. Scientists focus on ecosystem processes and monitoring; policymakers on development priorities and public investment; land users on livelihoods and productivity; communities on the changes they experience in their daily lives. A shared communication framework should not seek to replace these perspectives with a single narrative. Rather, it should provide common principles that make communication more coherent while remaining adaptable to different cultural, ecological and institutional contexts.

The following principles are proposed as a basis for discussion during COP17.

1. Make land degradation visible before its impacts become irreversible

One of the greatest obstacles to addressing desertification is that it often remains unnoticed until degradation has already undermined the productivity and resilience of landscapes. Unlike sudden disasters, declining soil fertility, reduced vegetation cover or the gradual loss of ecosystem functions rarely generate immediate public attention. *Communication should therefore help reveal processes that are otherwise difficult to perceive, making the links between environmental change and everyday life more explicit.*

Visibility should not depend solely on scientific indicators. Maps, monitoring systems and satellite imagery are indispensable, but they gain greater meaning when combined with local observation and lived experience. Farmers noticing declining yields, pastoralists adapting grazing routes, communities facing reduced water availability or young people witnessing changes in the landscapes where they grew up all provide perspectives that make scientific evidence more tangible¹¹. Presenting these different forms of knowledge together helps transform abstract environmental trends into issues that are relevant for decision-makers and citizens alike.

Making land degradation visible also means communicating the value of prevention. Public debate often begins when degradation has already reached critical levels, whereas the objectives of the Convention emphasise the need to avoid degradation wherever possible. *Communication should encourage a shift from responding to environmental decline towards safeguarding the ecological functions on which societies depend.*

⁷Gordon, H. S. J., Ross, J. A., Bauer-Armstrong, C., Moreno, M., Byington, R., and Bowman, N. (2023). Integrating Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge of land into land management through Indigenous-academic partnerships. *Land use policy*, 125, 106469.

⁸Tsioumani, E., Bansard, J. and Chasek, P. (2025). Indigenous Peoples in the Rio Conventions. International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).

⁹Mirzabaev, A. and Wuepper, D. (2023). Economics of ecosystem restoration. *Annual Review of Resource Economics*, 15(1), pp.329-350.

¹⁰Verburg, P.H., Metternicht, G., Allen, C., Debonne, N., Akhtar-Schuster, M., Inácio da Cunha, M., Karim, Z., Pilon, A., Raja, O., Sánchez Santivañez, M. and Senyaz, A. (2019). Creating an Enabling Environment for Land Degradation Neutrality and its Potential Contribution to Enhancing Well-being, Livelihoods and the Environment. A Report of the Science-Policy Interface. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Bonn, Germany.

¹¹Ndimbo, G.K. and Sanga, F. (2026). Climate-induced stress, migration and the escalation of farmer-herder conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 12(1), p.2646711.

2. Explain why healthy land matters

Communication is most effective when it begins with values that people already recognise. Healthy land is rarely appreciated for its own sake; it is valued because it supports food production, water resources, biodiversity, climate resilience, cultural identity and economic opportunity¹². Framing communication around these benefits helps place land at the centre of broader development priorities rather than treating it as a specialised environmental concern. *Carefully chosen metaphors and analogies can support communication across cultures and disciplines by translating complex ecological processes into concepts that are meaningful for policymakers, land users, business leaders, educators, Indigenous Peoples, youth and the wider public, while preserving scientific accuracy and respecting cultural diversity.*

This perspective is fully consistent with the integrated approach promoted by the UNCCD. Investments in sustainable land management contribute simultaneously to agricultural productivity, ecosystem conservation, adaptation to climate change and the resilience of rural communities¹³. Explaining these interconnections allows communication to bridge institutional boundaries and encourages collaboration among sectors that may otherwise address land issues independently.

A stronger public understanding of the multiple functions of healthy land can also reinforce political commitment. When restoration is recognised as an investment in food security, water security, public health, economic resilience and social stability, it becomes easier to integrate land degradation into national development strategies and public investment decisions¹⁴.

3. Bring scientific evidence, local experience and traditional knowledge into the same conversation

The UNCCD has consistently recognised that effective responses to desertification require scientific knowledge, local experience and the knowledge of people who live and work on the land. Communication should reflect this principle by creating dialogue between different knowledge systems rather than presenting them as competing sources of authority¹⁵.

Scientific research provides the evidence needed to understand degradation processes, assess risks and evaluate the effectiveness of restoration measures. It supports monitoring, target setting and policy development at national and international levels. At the same time, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, farmers and pastoralists possess detailed knowledge of landscapes that has been developed through long-term observation and practice. Their experience often provides practical insights into adaptation, resource management and restoration that cannot be derived from scientific assessment alone.

▼ Miskin, Ethiopia © Quirico Migheli



Traditional knowledge should be understood not as static heritage or anecdotal evidence, but as a living and evolving body of knowledge developed through generations of interaction with land. Practices related to water harvesting, soil and seed conservation, pastoral mobility, oasis management, agroforestry, food systems and the observation of ecological change can provide locally tested responses to land degradation and drought¹⁶.

Communication should move beyond a one-way transfer of information from experts to society. Rather, it should create opportunities for exchange and co-production, allowing scientific evidence to inform local action while enabling local and traditional knowledge to enrich research and policy. This approach strengthens trust, improves the relevance of communication and reflects the participatory spirit of the Convention. It should also ensure that knowledge holders are properly acknowledged and that the documentation and sharing of knowledge respect cultural contexts, consent and legitimate community interests¹⁷.

Communication can also support the intergenerational transmission of knowledge by connecting elders, women knowledge holders, farmers, pastoralists, artisans and young people. This is particularly important where changes in livelihoods, migration or environmental conditions threaten the continuity of oral traditions and place-based practices¹⁸.

The Science–Policy Interface also benefits from more effective communication. Policymakers rarely require scientific detail alone; they need evidence presented in ways that clarify policy choices, economic implications and potential outcomes. *Communicating research through policy briefs, visual tools, case studies and practical examples increases its usefulness while maintaining scientific rigour.*

¹²Malan, M., Berkhout, E., Duchoslav, J., Voors, M. and Van Der Esch, S. (2024). Socioeconomic impacts of land restoration in agriculture: a systematic review. *Q Open*, 4(2), p.qoae022.

¹³Stringer, L.C., Kruse, J., Akhtar-Schuster, M. and Ramirez, R.A. (2025). Break the political deadlock on drought through an integrated policy approach. *Anthropocene Science*, 4(3), pp.228–235.

¹⁴Garvey, J., Grigoriadis, V., Flannery, D., Knapp, E., Gold, E., Hutchinson, G., Frewer, L.J., Brereton, P. and Byrne, K.A. (2025). Designing financial instruments for land-based ecological restoration: A review and future research Agenda. *Cleaner Production Letters*, 8, p.100089.

¹⁵United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). (1994). United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Articles 16(g), 17(1)(c) and 18(2).

¹⁶UNESCO (2003). Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Articles 2(1), 2(3), 11(b) and 15; UNESCO, 2015. Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, endorsed by Decision 10.COM 15.a.

¹⁷Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992). Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8(j); CBD, 2016. Mo'tz Kuxtal Voluntary Guidelines, Decision XIII/18; CBD, 2022. Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Decision 15/4, Target 21.

¹⁸UNESCO, 2003. Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Articles 2(3), 14 and 15; UNESCO, 2015. Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.

4. Place restoration and solutions at the centre of communication

Desertification is often communicated primarily through images of environmental decline, drought and vulnerability. While these realities must not be understated, communication *that focuses exclusively on loss may unintentionally reinforce a sense of inevitability or discourage engagement.*

The implementation of the UNCCD demonstrates that restoration is both achievable and beneficial. Across drylands and other vulnerable landscapes, countries and communities have restored degraded ecosystems, improved soil health, increased productivity and strengthened resilience through sustainable land management. These experiences deserve greater visibility because they demonstrate that action can produce measurable environmental, social and economic benefits.

A stronger emphasis on solutions does not diminish the seriousness of the challenge. Rather, it reflects the Convention's commitment to prevention, restoration and sustainable management as practical responses to land degradation. *Communicating successful experiences encourages learning across regions, supports innovation and helps attract political and financial support.*

At the same time, communication should avoid presenting restoration as a universal model: successful initiatives are shaped by local ecological conditions, governance arrangements and social contexts. Their value does not lie in providing fixed templates, rather in demonstrating principles that can be adapted elsewhere. Sharing both achievements and lessons learned contributes to a more realistic, honest and credible narrative of restoration¹⁹.

5. Adapt communication to different audiences while maintaining a common purpose

Communication is most effective when it recognises that different audiences have different responsibilities, interests and capacities to act. A finance ministry considering investment in restoration requires different information from a local authority planning watershed management or from young people participating in community initiatives. Effective communication therefore combines consistent messages with approaches tailored to specific audiences and, wherever possible, developed with their participation.

This principle is particularly relevant to the implementation of Land Degradation Neutrality. National governments need evidence on the contribution of restoration to economic development and resilience. Land users require practical information that supports sustainable management decisions. Businesses increasingly seek guidance on responsible investment and sustainable value chains. Educators and media professionals play an important role in shaping public understanding, while youth organisations contribute new perspectives and innovative forms of engagement.

Digital communication offers important opportunities to reach these diverse audiences, but technology alone cannot replace meaningful dialogue. *Face-to-face exchanges, participatory processes, educational programmes and community-based communication remain essential for building trust and supporting long-term engagement*²⁰.



▲ Walata, Mauritania © Virgilio Balmas

¹⁹Leimu-Brown, N. (2025). Best practice and lessons learned from large-scale restoration projects. A review of published literature.

²⁰da Silva, H.T., Ceccon, E., Henrique, P.M.T., Nogueira, D.T.S. and Baldauf, C. (2025). Association between ecological and social outcomes and their links to community participation in ecosystem restoration: a global review. *Restoration Ecology*, 33(7), p.e70131.

Communication should use local languages and culturally rooted formats where appropriate, including oral histories, community radio, participatory theatre, exhibitions, visual storytelling, intergenerational dialogues and exchanges between knowledge holders. These approaches can reach audiences that may be poorly served by scientific publications or digital platforms. Involving communities in defining messages and producing materials about their territories, experience and knowledge helps avoid stereotypes, strengthens ownership and ensures that local voices are represented accurately²¹.

Tailoring communication does not imply changing the underlying message. Across all audiences, communication should reinforce the same central objective: healthy land is fundamental to sustainable development, restoring degraded land is a shared responsibility, and the knowledge and participation of affected communities are essential to lasting solutions.

6. Build partnerships that strengthen communication and implementation

The complexity of desertification means that no institution or sector can communicate effectively in isolation. Governments, scientific organisations, civil society, local communities, educators, media organisations, youth networks and the private sector all contribute different expertise, resources and channels for reaching society. In other words, *partnerships should be regarded as a strategic asset for communication*. Collaborative initiatives make it possible to combine scientific credibility with local experience, policy relevance with public engagement and global commitments with place-based action. They also help avoid fragmented or inconsistent messages that may reduce public understanding of land degradation. The Convention already provides a platform for such collaboration through its engagement with Parties, scientific institutions and accredited organisations. Building on these networks, communication can become a more integrated component of implementation, supporting cooperation across sectors and strengthening the visibility of successful restoration initiatives.

Finally, communication itself should be evaluated. Measuring the number of campaigns or publications provides only limited information about effectiveness. Greater attention should be given to whether communication improves understanding, informs policy, encourages participation and contributes to measurable progress towards Land Degradation Neutrality. *Integrating communication into monitoring and evaluation frameworks would help identify successful approaches and support continuous learning across the UNCCD community.* Together, these principles suggest that communication should be recognised as a strategic enabler of the Convention, and not just a supporting activity carried out *after* policies have been adopted.

By making land degradation more visible, connecting evidence with experience, promoting solutions and strengthening partnerships, communication can contribute directly to the implementation of the UNCCD and to the achievement of Land Degradation Neutrality.

Possible Outcomes of the COP17 Dialogue

The discussions at COP17 provide an opportunity to recognise communication as an integral component of the implementation of the Convention. Strengthening communication will not by itself reverse land degradation, but it can improve the conditions under which evidence informs policy, participation supports implementation and restoration becomes a shared societal objective.

This dialogue could identify a number of priorities for future collaboration.

A first priority would be to **encourage Parties to integrate communication more systematically into national strategies and programmes addressing desertification, land degradation and drought**. Considering communication from the design phase of policies and projects would strengthen stakeholder engagement, improve public understanding and reinforce long-term ownership of restoration initiatives.



▲ Hula, Ethiopia © Quirico Migheli

²¹UNCCD (1994). United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Article 19(1)(d)–(e) and Article 19(3)(d)–(f); UNESCO, 2003. Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Articles 14 and 15.

A second priority would be to **strengthen collaboration between the scientific community and communication professionals**. Scientific evidence remains the foundation for informed decision-making, yet its influence depends increasingly on the capacity to present complex information in forms that are accessible, policy-relevant and meaningful for different audiences. Closer cooperation between researchers, communicators, educators and practitioners would help bridge the gap between knowledge generation and practical implementation.

The dialogue could also **reaffirm the importance of inclusive communication that recognises local, Indigenous and traditional knowledge as essential components of sustainable land management**. Communities affected by land degradation should be represented not only as beneficiaries of restoration but also as partners whose knowledge, innovation and leadership contribute directly to achieving the objectives of the Convention.

Communication initiatives should support their meaningful participation in defining messages, documenting practices and sharing lessons, while respecting cultural contexts, attribution, consent and legitimate community interests²².

The COP17 dialogue could further encourage Parties and partners to establish mechanisms for documenting, safeguarding and responsibly sharing local and traditional knowledge relevant to sustainable land management, drought resilience and ecosystem restoration. Such mechanisms should be co-designed with knowledge holders, support intergenerational transmission and facilitate the incorporation of locally validated practices into education, research, policy and restoration programmes. Particular attention could be given to knowledge associated with water management, pastoral mobility, oasis systems, agrobiodiversity, soil conservation and community-based management of natural resources²³.

A further area for cooperation concerns the strategy to **improve the visibility of successful restoration initiatives**. Communicating practical examples from different regions can demonstrate that restoring degraded land is achievable and beneficial, while encouraging the exchange of experience among countries and stakeholders. Such communication should present restoration not as a universal model but as a process of adaptation informed by ecological conditions, scientific evidence, local experience and traditional knowledge. Where communities or knowledge holders contribute to documented examples, their role should be visible and appropriately acknowledged²⁴.

²²CBD (1992). Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8(j); CBD, 2022. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Section C and Target 21.

²³UNCCD (1994). United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Articles 16(g), 17(1)(c) and 18(2)(a)-(d); CBD, 2016. Mo'otz Kuxtal Voluntary Guidelines, Decision XIII/18; UNESCO, 2015. Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.

²⁴UNCCD (1994). United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Articles 17(1)(c) and 18(2); CBD, 1992. Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8(j).

Finally, COP17 could initiate a broader reflection on the need to develop a shared framework for communicating desertification. Rather than prescribing uniform communication practices, such a framework could provide common principles to guide Parties and stakeholders in presenting the challenges of land degradation and the opportunities offered by sustainable land management and restoration. It could reinforce coherence across the Convention while respecting the diversity of national and regional contexts.

Closing Statement

Desertification remains one of the defining environmental and development challenges of the twenty-first century. Although its impacts are increasingly well documented, they often remain insufficiently recognised in public debate and policy agendas because they emerge gradually and are experienced differently across landscapes and societies.

The UNCCD has established a comprehensive framework for addressing these challenges through sustainable land management, restoration, scientific cooperation and inclusive governance. Achieving its objectives, however, depends not only on technical capacity and financial resources, but also on the ability to build a shared understanding of why healthy land matters and why collective action is both necessary and possible.

Communication is central to this effort, as it connects scientific evidence with policy, links global commitments with local realities and creates opportunities for dialogue among governments, researchers, communities, land users, educators, civil society and young people. An effective communication strengthens participation, supports informed decision-making and helps translate knowledge into action.

Recognising communication as an enabling component of the Convention does not add a new objective to the UNCCD: it strengthens the implementation of those that already exist. By making land degradation more visible, promoting solutions, valuing diverse knowledge systems and fostering partnerships, communication can contribute directly to the achievement of Land Degradation Neutrality and to the broader goals of sustainable development.

The discussions taking place at COP17 during the side event: "From an invisible crisis to collective action: communicating about desertification and mobilising solutions" offer an opportunity to move from recognising this potential to defining practical ways of realising it. A shared framework for communicating desertification could become an important contribution to the next phase of implementation of the Convention, helping to transform scientific knowledge into public understanding, political commitment and sustained collective action.