



# UNCCD COP16 Riyadh

## **BRIEFING KIT**

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
2-13 December 2024



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### INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS COP16?

UNCCD COP16 stands for the 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

UNCCD is one of the three major treaties known as the Rio Conventions— alongside climate change and biodiversity – and is the only internationally legally binding framework set up to address the problem of desertification.

This is an opportunity to reset current trajectory of land degradation and shape a world where land sustains future generations

UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh is the first major UN conference hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

This is also the first time a UNCCD COP is held in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

### OPERATING CONTEXT: 2024 IS A YEAR OF COPS

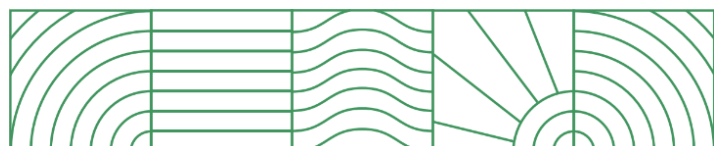
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Three major UN conferences, all occurring in Q4 of 2024,

- **United Nations Biodiversity Conference:** Cali, Colombia, 21 October - 1 November 2024
- **COP29 Azerbaijan:** Baku, Azerbaijan, 11-22 November 2024
- **UNCCD COP16 Riyadh:** Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2-13 December 2024.

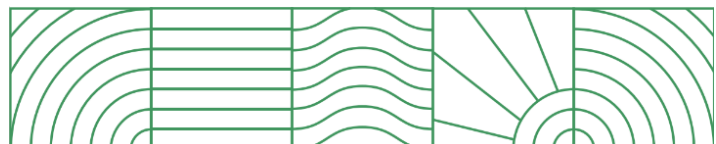
### WHAT ABOUT COP 16 RIYADH SUMMIT?

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While little has been discussed in the public sphere of what needs to happen to achieve the UN pledge of restoring 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030, the UNCCD COP16 which will be hosted in Riyadh will see key industry players come together to accelerate action to curb land degradation and drive conservation and restoration.

COP16 Riyadh will unite stakeholders to accelerate global land restoration efforts, leaving a legacy of action for land restoration and drought resilience.



## HISTORY OF PAST UNCCD COPS – RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS, INITIATIVES, PROGRESS

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Each COP has contributed to a gradual buildup of commitments and strategies aimed at combating desertification, including the introduction of the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) target.

Various global initiatives, such as the Great Green Wall in Africa and the Bonn Challenge, have been launched or supported through COP decisions.

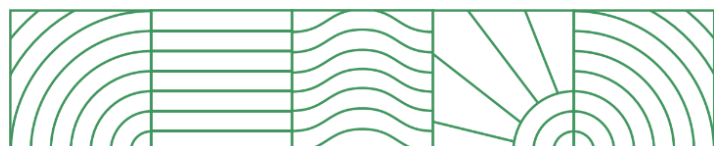
COPs have increasingly addressed the need to build resilience against droughts, which are closely linked to land degradation and desertification.

**Great Green Wall:** Spanning 8000 KM across Africa, restore 100 million hectares of currently degraded land; sequester 250 million tons of carbon and create 10 million green jobs by 2030.

**Bonn Challenge:** The Bonn Challenge is a global goal to bring 150 million hectares of degraded and deforested landscapes into restoration by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030.

**Land Degradation Neutrality targets-** In 2015, UNCCD Parties were invited to formulate voluntary targets to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in accordance with their specific national circumstances and development priorities.

- **Increased Global Awareness:** Raised awareness and political commitment to combat desertification, with more countries incorporating UNCCD goals into national policies.
- **Global Land Outlook Reports:** Publication of reports that assess land degradation and provide policy recommendations.
- **LDN Fund Creation:** Establishment of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund to finance sustainable land management and restoration projects.
- **Enhanced Monitoring:** Improved systems for tracking progress on land degradation and the effectiveness of strategies.
- **Stronger Partnerships:** Strengthened global collaborations between governments, organizations, and the private sector for more coordinated efforts.



## UNCCD COP16 IN RIYADH

### About the event

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*“The hosting of the conference (COP16) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reflects the commitment of the wise leadership to environmental protection at the national, regional, and international levels.”*

Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen AlFadley, Saudi Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture and COP16 President

### THEMATIC DAYS OF COP16 IN RIYADH

**4<sup>th</sup> December 2024: Land Day (12 events)**

**5<sup>th</sup> December 2024: Food Systems Day (9 events)**

**6<sup>th</sup> December 2024: Land Governance Day (14 events)**

**7<sup>th</sup> December 2024: People Day (7 events)**

**9<sup>th</sup> December 2024: Science, Technology & Innovation Day (10 events)**

**10<sup>th</sup> December: Resilience Day (13 events)**

**11<sup>th</sup> December: Finance Day (7 events)**

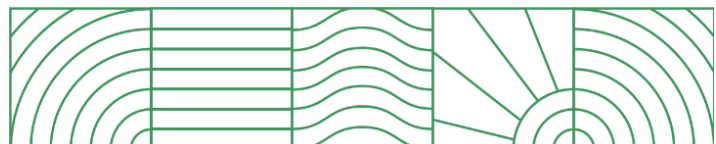
### GREEN ZONE & BLUE ZONE DURING COP16 RIYADH

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The terms "Green Zone" and "Blue Zone" are often used in the context of United Nations climate conferences, to refer to different areas within the conference venue that serve distinct purposes:

**Green Zone:** The Green Zone is a space open to the public, including civil society organizations, NGOs, businesses, youth groups, and other stakeholders. It hosts a variety of events, exhibitions, workshops, and discussions, focusing on public engagement, education, and climate action.

This inclusive space encourages knowledge-sharing, networking, and dialogue on land degradation and sustainability, often showcasing innovative solutions like new technologies and community projects.



**Blue Zone:** The Blue Zone is a restricted area accessible only to government delegates, negotiators, UN officials, and accredited media and observers, where official negotiations and high-level meetings occur.

It serves as the hub for discussing and drafting agreements, policies, and frameworks guiding international climate action.

Access requires official accreditation from the UN or the hosting country, underscoring its role in formal diplomatic and policy-making activities.

## WHO WILL BE THERE?

The UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh will gather governments, business and civil society at the largest event ever of its kind to accelerate action on land and drought resilience.

### AUDIENCES AND STAKEHOLDERS

**Civil Society and NGOs**

**Academia and Research Institutions**

**Indigenous communities and action groups**

**Youth Organizations**

**Women's groups**

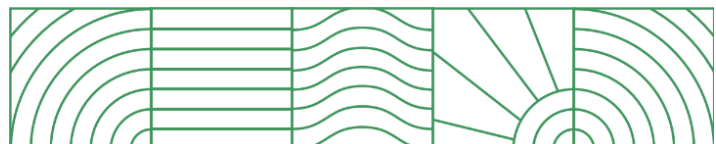
**Private sector**

**International financial institutions**

## COP16 NARRATIVE AND MESSAGING

### COP16 KEY MESSAGES

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## UNCCD COP16 MESSAGING

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### **1. The UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh is a key opportunity for the international community to curb land degradation and desertification, and increase drought resilience**

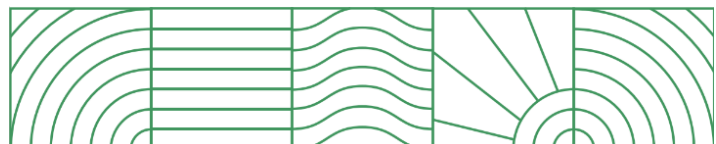
- Globally, 3.2 billion people have already been impacted by land degradation, with that figure only set to increase unless multilateral action is taken.
- Land is critical to life. Our food, water, biodiversity and climate health depend on it. Land must be at the heart of global action to combat drought, famine and forced migration.
- For too long the issue of land degradation has been overlooked. Enhancing land conservation, accelerating land restoration and addressing the underlying issues of drought, desertification and land degradation is the solution to safeguard food and water security, and conserve vegetation cover in forests and rangelands.
- Addressing land degradation now will help us tackle worsening, life-threatening, humanitarian crises.
- There is no time to waste. Between 2015 and 2019, at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive lands were degraded every year—equating to an area the size of Egypt.

### **2. Saudi Arabia's COP16 Presidency will seek to galvanize global action to help achieve the UNCCD goal of restoring 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030.**

- During this critical COP, we will work to rally the international community to deliver enhanced commitments to restore land and prevent further loss.
- Expecting to attract up to 20,000 people, COP16 will be the largest UNCCD COP to date, and for the first time featuring a Green Zone to enable the public, private sector, NGOs, scientific community, and financial institutions, to find and fund lasting solutions.
- The Kingdom has already helped drive international action, with the Global Land Initiative launched by the Group of Twenty (G20) during the G20 in Riyadh, pledging to halve land degradation by 2040.

### **3. The challenge of drought knows no borders. The world must shift from a reactive response to proactive resilience.**

- In places like California and sub-Saharan Africa, traditional water sources are drying up, leaving communities with an uncertain future.
- Here in the Americas, more than 71% of California's land is abnormally dry
- The wildfire season arrived early this year in the American west, posing a severe challenge. Almost a million acres have burned in California so far this year.



- According to the [Brazilian Geological Service](#), water levels in many of the rivers in the Amazon basin have reached their lowest on record amid a continuing drought with Brazil's natural disaster monitoring agency Cemaden saying the drought is the "most intense and widespread" it has ever recorded.
- The UNCCD estimates three out of every four people in the world are projected to face water scarcity.
- Drought and the loss of arable land for food production is a key driver of forced migration around the world. Tackling land degradation and accelerating restoration in impacted regions can help create thriving communities and limit the instability caused by forced migration.

#### **4. Land restoration pays dividends in environmental and economic benefits.**

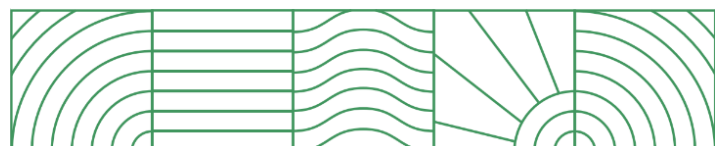
- Restoring land could generate \$1.4 trillion annually in increased crop production according to the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative.
- 40% of the planet's land is already degraded, affecting half of humanity and threatening roughly half of global GDP (\$44 trillion), which according to the UNCCD is moderately or highly reliant on natural capital.
- Every dollar invested in restoring degraded lands brings between \$7-30 in economic returns. Multilateral policy and economic incentives are urgently needed to help unlock a trillion-dollar restoration economy.

#### **5. In the heart of Riyadh, from 2-13 December 2024, an extraordinary UNCCD COP will take place:** creating a global hub of environmental action and hope.

- The Blue Zone will host the formal UNCCD agenda for government officials and official parties and observers, with 90 to 100 fixed events and over 120 side events.
- The Green Zone will be open to the public, highlighting real-world solutions to desertification, from innovative technologies to grassroots projects. It's a place where ideas come to life, demonstrating the tangible impact of land restoration.

## **UNCCD COP16 KEY FACTS**

- The Riyadh COP16 will be the largest-ever meeting of UNCCD's 197 Parties and the largest multilateral conference ever hosted by Saudi Arabia..
- Up to 40% of the world's land is degraded, according to the UNCCD, affecting half of humanity and with dire consequences for our climate, biodiversity, and livelihoods.





- Droughts are hitting more often and harder all over the world - up by 29% since 2000 - driven by climate change but also the way we manage our land.
- One-quarter of the world's population is already affected by droughts, with every three out of four people around the world projected to face water scarcity by 2050.
- Over 2 billion hectares of land is degraded around the world, and we will be urging action to address this as the hosts of the UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh.

## POTENTIAL Q&A

### WHAT DO YOU HOPE THE RIYADH COP16 WILL ACHIEVE?

This is a critical moment to ensure the long-term health of land around the world, and avoid the devastating impact on people, the climate, and biodiversity loss, that further land degradation will cause. The UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh will be an opportunity for the international community to take much needed action on this issue and begin restoring land.

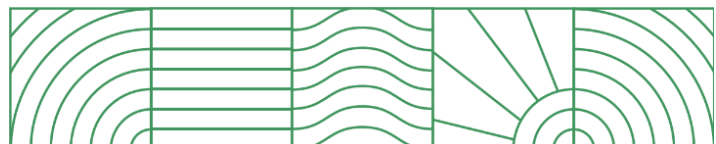
We simply can't afford to wait another two years until the next UNCCD COP. That's why we will push for more concrete pledges to meet the UNCCD target of restoring 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030. Saudi Arabia's UNCCD COP16 Presidency intends to give a voice to the 3.2 billion people impacted by land degradation, culminating in tangible, lasting change.

### WHAT ACTION HAS SAUDI ARABIA TAKEN ITSELF TO ADDRESS LAND DEGRADATION?

Saudi Arabia has, and will continue to, lead on land restoration action. Recognizing the key role land plays through the Saudi Green Initiative, Saudi Arabia has committed to rehabilitate over 40 million hectares of land. Since 2021, 94,000 Hectares of degraded land has been rehabilitated and 49 million plants and shrubs have been planted.

Regionally, as part of our Middle East Green Initiative, we intend to plant 50 billion trees across the region and restore 200 million hectares of degraded land. As an arid country impacted by desertification, we understand the issues and are determined to find sustainable solutions. Our COP16 Presidency will raise awareness of the critical need to address land degradation by delivering the most high-profile UNCCD COP16 to-date.

### HOW IS SAUDI ARABIA COLLABORATING WITH OTHER COUNTRIES OR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN ITS EFFORTS TO RESTORE DEGRADED LAND?



At the 2020 G20 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia proved instrumental in delivering a key international program to restore degraded land by partnering with the Group of 20 nations and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to launch the G20 Land initiative, which aims to slash the amount of degradation by 50 per cent by 2040.

At COP16, we intend to work with international partners and organizations to deliver a milestone moment in the global effort to prevent land degradation and will use our role as hosts to champion urgent action. We are already actively engaged with wide array of key stakeholders around the world to help deliver a UNCCD COP that will be remembered as a pivotal moment in the fight against land degradation.

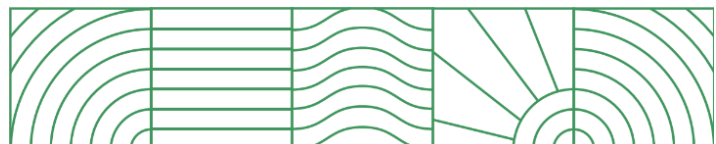
### **WHY SHOULD PEOPLE CARE ABOUT LAND DEGRADATION? IF YOU'RE NOT IMPACTED BY DROUGHT DIRECTLY, WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?**

There is barely a corner of the planet left untouched by land degradation, drought and desertification. Land degradation is much more than just drought and desertification, although they are two extreme and concerning effects of it. It is how it impacts our climate, the loss of natural habitats that decimate biodiversity and wildlife, the loss of arable land for food production and the retention of freshwater.

Land degradation also manifests in some of the extreme environmental occurrences that are unfortunately growing in frequency and severity for many people around the world, whether its wildfires hitting the American West earlier this year, the dramatic increase in dry land in California comparable to last year, or the severe drought gripping the Amazon.

### **HOW DO YOU PLAN TO GALVANISE THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND LEAVE A STREAM OF FINANCE FOR COMBATTING LAND DEGRADATION BEYOND COP16?**

- Importantly, the conversion of land for agriculture to meet the demands for food, feed, fiber and bioenergy production is the leading driver of land-use change
- We need to unlock funding mechanisms like those available via multilateral development banks. We want this COP to be defined by action by the international community, moving from target-setting to tangible implementation, particularly when it comes to the UNCCD target of restoring 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030.
- Then there's more nuanced levers, such as ensuring greater drought resilience and enhancing sustainable land management mechanisms, one example being drought insurance.
- In terms of restoration, focusing on regenerative land use is an opportunity to safeguard businesses from the impacts of climate change and land degradation. Restoring ecosystems and soil biodiversity is among the most effective weapons against weather extremes. Restoring land can create employment and drive economic growth.



We are supporting the UNCCD's Business4Land strategy and partnering on a number of their initiatives through workshops, webinars and special meetings which seek to mobilize the power of the private sector to advance Land Degradation Neutrality.

The Business4Land initiative unites private sector leaders to improve business practices, contribute to sustainable financing tools, explore leveraging mobile new technologies and best practices to support further land restoration investments.

- We are also working with the UN Global Compact to leverage the relationship they have with over 25,000 businesses around the globe which already support the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- In many senses land restoration pays for itself. We need to stop thinking about the cost, and focus on how much more economic productivity, and food and water security could be leveraged globally by increasing investment.
- Quite simply, not investing in sustainable land management costs trillions of dollars every year. There is a tangible cost to inaction. In fact, the UNCCD in its 2022 Global Land Outlook report estimates land degradation puts at US\$44 trillion every year at moderate to high risk, roughly half of global GDP.

