

# Local and Regional Governments united against drought and desertification:

## Declaration and Call for Engagement

### Acknowledging that:

- **Local and regional governments (LRGs) are critical actors** in addressing desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD) due to their unique proximity to local communities and local resources, as well as local realities and their capacity to contribute to the design, to implement impactful, communities and context-specific solutions.
- The UNCCD process increasingly acknowledges their role as key actors in combating DLDD, furthermore, the LRGs Constituency have a recognized mechanism before the United Nations system which is the Global Task Force and in particular for other Rio Conventions (e.g., the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency LGMA in UNFCCC and GTF through the Local and Subnational Government Summits in CBD) which demonstrate the importance of dedicated spaces and contributions for LRGs in global processes.
- **The UNCCD COP16 Mayors' Forum held in Riyadh, Saudia Arabia on 06 December 2024 aimed atexplored the ways and means of empowering** local and regional governments and fostering a whole-of-governance and whole-of-society collaboration to address the pressing challenges of drought, climate change, and land degradation.
- **Emphasized** the need for local authorities and their communities to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, tools, and resources through targeted awareness programs. Alongside the establishment of local drought task forces engaging other non-state actors.
- **Highlighted** the necessity of alignment of local actions with global frameworks, by advocating for stronger integration of local perspectives into national policies and proposing reforms that reflect on-the-ground realities, and building on previous achievements of local and regional governments constituency through Mayors Forums at UNCCD COP1 and COP2, but especially intensified since UNCCD COP13, in particular with the Local Governments Day at COP14, including recognition at the Delhi Declaration, as well as Decision 22 adopted at **COP15**.
- **Stated** Financial mobilization as a critical component, channeled through local and regional governments to focus on investments in drought-resilient and flood-resilient infrastructure, territorial food systems, and community-based adaptive projects, with mechanisms to ensure transparency in loss and damage fund allocations related to Desertification processes.
- **Generated a transboundary approach** through local and regional territories that opens a pathway to unite local efforts in combating Land Degradation and Drought recognizing the interconnectedness of biomes, landscapes and watercourses

## **Commitments**

**We, the undersigned Mayors and Governors, and other authorities in Local and Regional Governments, representing cities and communities across the globe, have convened in Riyadh on the occasion of the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP16)**

Reaffirming our commitment to the principles of sustainable development and the goals set forth in global frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Global Biodiversity Framework, and Land Degradation Neutrality targets under the UNCCD, and the Sharm Adaptation Agenda, we pledge to advance a unified vision to empower local and municipal authorities and their communities as transformative actors to effectively address interlinked sustainability challenges.

Recognize that:

- the escalating impacts of the triple risks of climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation on our communities, economies, and ecosystems, water resources, require local leadership to contribute to and complement global and national actions.
- the integration of Land-Based & Nature-Based Solutions, as well as a new relationship between Nature and Urban components into local governance is needed to enhance resilience through actions such as urban-rural development, wetland restoration, aquifer recharge, landscape planning, zoning and land market regulation, reforestation and sustainable watershed management while sharing best practices across regions
- DLDD is intrinsically linked to rural-urban linkages (URL), food security, water management and security, migration, and climate resilience, requiring a holistic and integrated approach to achieve sustainable outcomes.
- Urbanization and the unbridled consumption of natural resources are major drivers of DLDD, exacerbating vulnerabilities in both rural and urban areas, while cities remain the main destinations for climate migration and hubs for economic activity as well as frontline responders to the impact of climate change.

**We hereby Call on Local and Regional Governments and UNCCD for a Structural Engagement:**

calling UNCCD Secretariat and Parties to engage systemically and structurally with the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments in the pursuit of solutions to drought and land degradation. And a call for other cities and mayors globally to join the coalition, amplifying the reach and impact of this initiative. This includes:

1. **Fostering Regional Collaboration** for Shared Challenges by promoting regional networks to coordinate efforts and share best practices and develop cross-border initiatives addressing land degradation and water security

2. **Facilitating cross-cutting thematic collaboration** acknowledging that cities are the canvas where the sectors integrate in people's lives, thus partnerships between LRG to create integrated land management solutions encompassing all sectors are crucial.
3. **Promoting education and awareness** by developing and implementing public awareness campaigns about DLDD and its consequences. Providing targeted training programs for policymakers and practitioners on innovative DLDD governance solutions. Engaging schools and local communities in educational initiatives to build grassroots support for combating DLDD.
4. **Fostering collaboration and decentralized cooperation between LRGs, national governments, and international organizations** to implement comprehensive and inclusive solutions that are **policy-driven and under long-term frameworks**
5. **Delivering a structural mechanism for the self-organized constituency** of local and regional governments to UNCCD in between COPs and at COPs through the components of the Riyadh Process, legacy of COP16 on Desertification, building on the experiences of constituency based engagement at other Rio Conventions (UNFCCC-climate, CBD\_biodiversity) as well as High Level Political Forum, UN Environment Assembly and UN Habitat Assembly.
6. **Defining and launching the Riyadh Process: a Joint Roadmap between Local and Regional Governments Constituency and UNCCD with key stakeholders, that would be policy-oriented supportive of local action.** This roadmap would include:
  - a. empowering local and regional governments and their communities through capacity-building initiatives, providing tools and resources to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of drought, and fostering inclusive participation in decision-making to encourage grassroots innovation and partnerships with the private sector;
  - b. enhancing access to financial resources for local climate adaptation and resilience initiatives, including territorial food systems and climate-resilient infrastructure, and promoting community-driven solutions to address the escalating challenges posed by drought, desertification and land degradation; and
  - c. advancing actions in critical areas, including a unified approach to land use and resource management, exploring innovative financing mechanisms for local projects, partnerships for catchment conservation, fostering sustainable economic strategies such as green jobs and eco-tourism, and supporting localized food systems to strengthen resilience against climate-induced food insecurity, etc.
  - d. convening an annual dialogue to review progress of the implementation all 3 Rio Conventions at the local and subnational level in between different COP cycles, within the scope of Daring Cities Forum Dialogues in Bonn, pursuant to its role as the seat of UNFCCC, UNCCD and IPBES Secretariats and focal point role of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability at the 3 Rio Conventions



on behalf of Global Task Force as per the World Mayors Assembly Declaration on December 2019.

## **Declaration**

By signing this declaration, we affirm our commitment to actively contribute to the global fight against desertification, land degradation, and drought. We call on the international community, including the Parties to the UNCCD and the other Rio conventions, to provide the necessary platforms, resources, and partnerships to enable us to fulfill these commitments effectively. Together, we can build resilient communities and ensure a sustainable future for all.

**Endorsed by all those presents**